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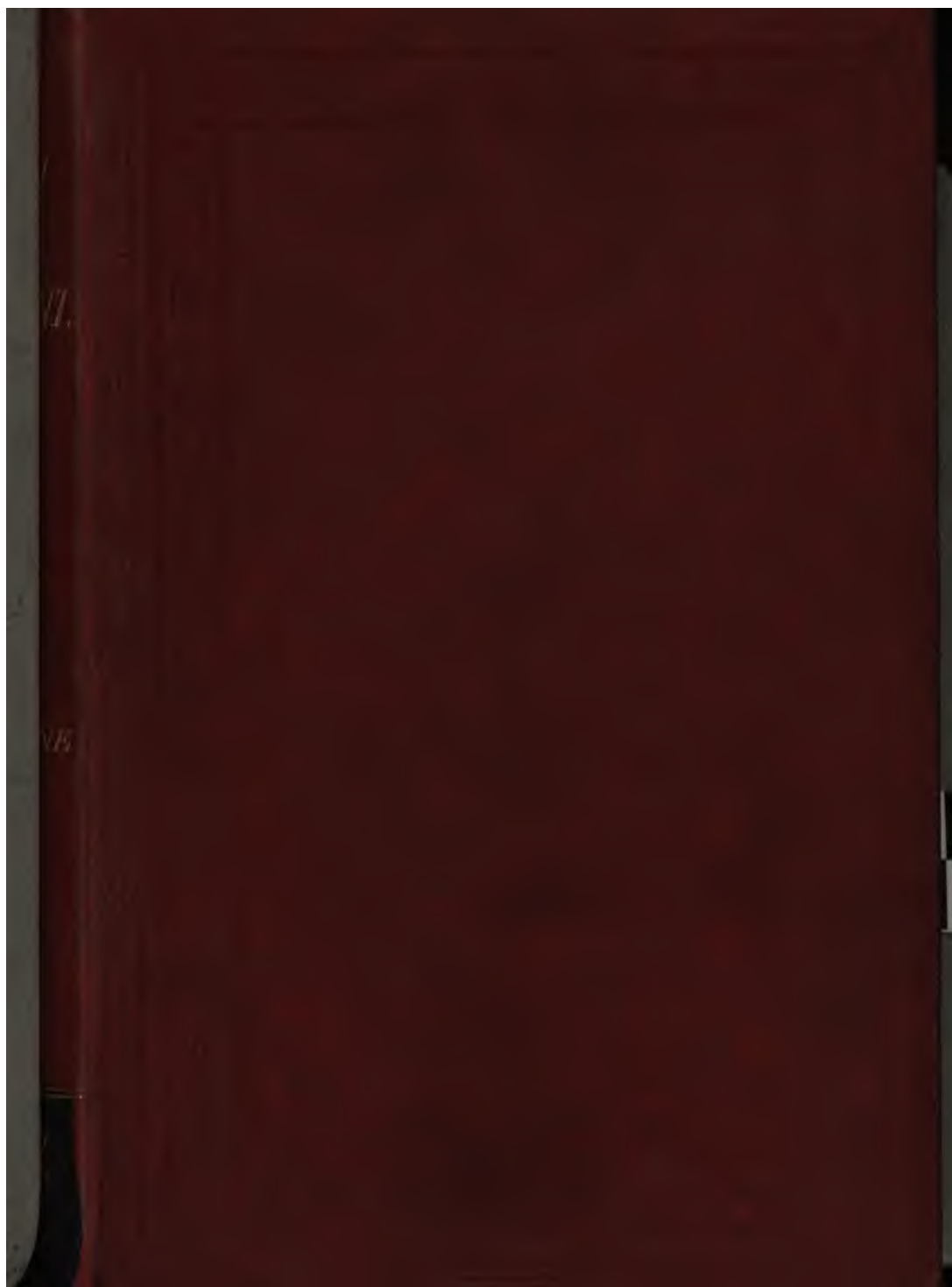
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THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

VOL. I.

THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

BY

KATHARINE KING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

CHAPTER I.

“COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.”

“**M**ABEL, love, I'm off now. Take care of yourself and the child, till I come back. Marlin's below, waiting for me, and I had better not keep him or I shall catch it.”

So spoke Guy Leveston, at the unearthly hour of four o'clock in the night, or morning, whichever you like to call it, bending over his wife while speaking, and kissing the sweet face she held up to him.

“Oh! Guy,” she answered, sitting up in bed, and leaning towards him anxiously, “I do wish you were not going to this horrid hunt; I am so frightened. The thought of the dan-

ger you are about to run has kept me awake all night. For my sake, give it up this once. I never felt so nervous about you before; but it seems to me now, I shall never see you again; and besides," she went on, with a little hesitation in her manner, as if half ashamed of herself for being so superstitious, "I had a terrible dream just now. I must have dozed for a few minutes, and in that short time I fancied I was dead, and, though dead, I seemed to be present at my own funeral. I thought my grave was under the banian tree in the cemetery—the one in the far corner I mean; and I saw you so distinctly; your face was ghastly; it frightens me still to think of it. Then, whilst I looked, it seemed to me that I rose out of the coffin, and you took my place; and while I gazed and wondered, with a cruel terror at my heart, I awoke and found it a dream. Don't laugh at me, Guy dear, for this, but I know and feel that if you go out to-day to this hunt I shall see your face no more. What pleasure can such a dangerous sport be to you; are not I and Cecil interest enough for you in life, with-

out being obliged to seek amusement in tiger-hunting?"

He laughed a little ; he loved his pretty wife and their child dearly, and yet he liked his fun, with the other young fellows of the regiment, very much too. Certainly Mabel never opposed his enjoying himself with them, but, on the contrary, took a lively interest in all his adventures and escapades ; and as she really seemed frightened, he would have liked to oblige her in this ; but then a tiger-hunt, such a one as you don't get every day, only three of the best fellows in the regiment besides himself—it was too tempting, he really could not give it up. He was sure, also, there was no danger ; certainly not with four such first-rate shots, as himself and his three friends. Perhaps, also, there was a little fear, though truly I think not much, of what these friends would think and say of him if he withdrew from their party at the last moment because his wife was frightened. So he answered her coaxingly and soothingly,

“Mabel, darling, do be reasonable ; there's

not a chance of anything awkward happening. I'll be very careful, and you shall have the skin if I can get it for you, consistently with the prudence I promise you to observe. It will make a charming rug for Cecil to play on, and you will be so proud of it, you will be only too glad I didn't heed you and stay at home. Besides, darling, how many times have you had dreadful dreams and unearthly portents, when I was only going out hunting at home, or schooling a young horse or something of that sort. I have no faith in your dreams, pet."

She smiled a little; now that she was looking at him alive and strong before her, and listening to his cheerful voice, the remembrance of her dream faded, and she felt half inclined to call herself foolish for having given it credence. Still, it was with a heavy sigh that she replied,

"Well, I shan't be happy till you return. So come back as soon as you can, and for our sakes be careful."

He kissed her again, she passed her arms round his neck, and held him for a moment

with convulsive strength, trembling at the same time violently. As she loosened her clasp, he looked at her keenly and said,

“Why, love, I don’t think you can be well. It is that which gives you such strange fears about our little expedition. Shall I call at Dr. Menton’s as I drive past, and tell him to come and see you.”

“There is nothing the matter with me,” she replied; “I am a little feverish, from not having slept, and from having fidgeted myself all night about you. If only you escape safe to-day, you will see me blooming again to-morrow. However, if you are passing Dr. Menton’s, you might tell him to send me up one of those cooling draughts he generally gives me.”

“All right—I won’t forget; and now I really must be off, for Marlin’s a terribly impatient fellow, and I have kept him an age already.” So saying, and nodding with a loving smile to his young wife as he passed through the doorway, Guy Leveston joined his friend, and thought no more of his wife’s fears, or the promises he had made her to be cautious.

Guy Leveston was the youngest son of Charles Edward Viscount Magnum. It is well known that in that family there is more blood than money ; so Lord Magnum's friends thought him a very wise and far-seeing person (which indeed he was) when he told his youngest son Guy, on his entering Sandhurst, that his success in life would depend on his own exertions, and that he had better show what he was made of at once by passing for a free commission. Guy had very good abilities, but they were combined with an enthusiastic taste for out-of-door games and athletic sports of all kinds ; and he soon became known at college, both to the cadets and professors, more as first favourite—if one may so express it—for the Autumn athletic sports—in particular for the steeple-chase, with the long water jump, than from any devotion to his studies. So at Christmas, when he returned home laden with trophies of his out-of-door prowess, he was not a little taken aback by his father's informing him that such distinction was not calculated to be of any use to him in life, unless he contemplated stepping

into Deerfoot's shoes, or earning his bread by walking a thousand miles in a thousand hours for wagers; and that unless he passed for a free commission before next Christmas, the very handsome thoroughbred horse, at that time occupying a comfortable loose-box in the Magnum stables, and known to the grooms as Master Guy's 'unter, should be his no longer.

The threat had the desired effect. Guy set to work with a will, and managed to pass, if not at the top of the list, at least high enough up to secure the necessary commission; and thus he became gazetted to the —th Dragoons before he was nineteen years of age.

Things went on very well with him for two or three years. An aunt died, leaving him a small property, of about six hundred a year. He was a great pet, not only in his own family, but everywhere he went, and seemed likely to have a most successful life. He had fallen in and out of love several times, as young fellows will do who have nothing better to occupy them; but for all that his heart was so whole that no one would have suspected him of having

one, but for its performing the necessary vital functions with praiseworthy regularity.

So matters went on very smoothly, till one June day he took up his fishing-tackle, and went to try his luck in the little river that ran through S——, the town in which he was quartered. It was a wild district in the west of Ireland, and one would have thought him safe there if anywhere. But as he wandered on, whipping the water with untiring energy, but very indifferent success, he came suddenly on a young girl sitting reading on a rock overhanging the stream. She started at the sound of his footsteps, and the parasol she was holding loosely in her hand fell into the water. Of course Guy stepped in after it, getting pretty well wet, it must be admitted, as the water rose above his knees; but the parasol was recovered, and handed back to its owner, with an apology for having startled her, and thus caused the accident.

Looking up in her face as he spoke, he became aware that it was—at least to him—the loveliest he had ever seen; and the half shy,

half amused smile with which she looked down on him from her rocky perch was so enchanting that he forgot entirely he was standing nearly up to his waist in water.

"I am sorry I startled you," he repeated. "You were immensely absorbed in your book. May I ask what it is?—I find it so hard to get anything readable now."

"Your tastes and mine may differ," she answered. "However, I suppose you read novels too, in private, though in general men are ashamed to confess the weakness. It is Whyte Melville's 'Brookes of Bridlemere.' I daresay you know it."

"I should think so," he replied; "and a capital book it is. Can you tell me if there are any fish in this stream—I can catch nothing—and if there are any, of what kind?"

"Rather a large kind, from what I can see," she laughed, with an irrepressible outburst of merriment. "Do you not think you would be more comfortable on land than in the river? Excuse my laughing, but you did look so funny, standing in the water in such an unconscious

manner. I have been trying not to smile for the last ten minutes."

He joined in her merry laugh, as he sprang on to the rock beside her; and when she recovered sufficiently to be able to speak calmly again, she directed him to the best hole for fish in the river; and then, picking up her book and rescued parasol, turned homewards along a shady path that seemed to lead back in the direction of the town.

He didn't take kindly to his fishing after she left, notwithstanding his newly-acquired knowledge of the trout's favourite hiding-place; on the contrary, he sat down under a wide-spreading sycamore that overhung the deep dark pool, and tried to recall this stranger's face and form in every minute particular.

"What was she like?" he mused. "I know she was lovely and charming; I should know her again if I met her, and yet I hardly think I could describe her appearance categorically, as I should be able to do with most women. Her hair was brown, I think; no, it was golden. I thought I never saw such golden hair, as she

moved off in the sunlight ; and yet it was brown too, for I remember thinking what a rich colour. I have it. It was brown in shade and golden in the light—exquisite hair ; such wavy, silky stuff, and no end of it, coiled and rolled round her head in every direction. A creamy skin, with a bright pink flush in it ; dark hazel eyes, black in some lights, brown or grey in others ; dark eyebrows, and eyelashes long and black, falling over those splendid eyes. For the rest, every feature lovely, and a most adorably smiling mouth ; large or small I cannot tell, but simply and undeniably perfect, ever varying in expression, and ever delightful to look upon. Slight and *petite* in figure ; and then what an exquisite foot peeped out from under her petticoat ! She doesn't look rich either ; her gloves were worn, though neat ; her parasol—the delightful old thing to which I owed my introduction—faded and shabby, and her dress poor though tidy and well-made. Who can she be ? I must find out. What did she say ? I can't remember. Yes, now I know ; she laughed at my standing in the water. How could a fellow

help it, I should like to know, when his senses were smiled away by a witch like that; and what a smile! I declare only thinking of it drives me crazy."

Thus he dreamed on, till the lengthening shadows warned him of the approach of evening, and that he had better think of returning to barracks. Very unwillingly he wound up his line, and set out on his homeward way, casting a lingering glance back at the spot where this fairy vision had greeted him, as if he half expected to see it there still. When he returned to barracks, he found it impossible to shake off the spell this unknown beauty had thrown over him; he was *distract* and silent, so much so that his brother officers remarked his abstraction.

"Come, Leveston," said Mayhew—a man a few years his senior, fond of chaffing, and well up in the ways of the young ones, in which category he included Guy—"tell us who's your new flame—no, it's no use denying the soft impeachment; I read it in every line of your most expressive countenance. You're hard hit,



my boy, too ; we had better provide you with a guard in future when you go out, and as an old and experienced hand is best suited to this emergency, I'll take the office on myself. If another young one went out with you, you'd get in no end of a mess together."

Guy didn't quite like being chaffed on the subject, but he knew full well that if he let Mayhew see that, he'd get plenty of it ; so he answered, as carelessly as possible,

"Thanks for your offer of protection ; I'm afraid you would find it rather a bore if you came to put it into execution ; and besides, I haven't seen a soul I knew out to-day." Which was, strictly speaking, quite true, though intended to deceive.

It didn't mislead the pertinacious Mayhew, however. He looked keenly at him for a minute, and then said,

"You mayn't have known her, but you saw her, and I'll bet you a fiver I know who it is."

"I'll not bet with you," replied Guy, laughing ; "for very likely, as you know so much, you do know who she is."


"It's a girl with lots of brown and yellow hair, very dark eyes, and pretty, picture-looking complexion; a nice, neat figure, moves well, and looks as if she could dance. Yes, that's the one, Master Guy, I see by your face; and I know her name, too, and all about her."

"Well, who is she?" inquired Guy, eagerly.

"She's a governess at Mrs. Boyd's—the people who live in that large house just out of town on the Dublin road. Her name's Annesley; she's the daughter of an officer—a man I used to know; he's dead now, however, and she has taken up the governessing trade. She has not been long at it, though, and I should hardly think it suited her. She's too pretty to be thrown away on that kind of thing."

In this verdict Leveston fully agreed, and determined that, in some way or other, he would obtain an introduction, and prosecute his chance acquaintance as far as circumstances would permit.

In the meantime, Mabel Annesley, whilst walking slowly back to Beaulieu (the Boyds' place was so called), laughed quietly over the



curious rencontre of the morning, and hoped that nice-looking young man had not thought her very rude for making fun of the moist position he had taken up. He was very good-looking, she thought—tall and dark, with soft, kind eyes, that could flash very brightly with either pleasure or anger, she imagined; dark whiskers and moustache, with dark and very closely-cropped hair, from which last peculiarity she imagined he must be one of the officers of the —th, at that time quartered in S—, as the gentry of that backward place did not generally follow the present close-cutting fashion.

The curious or rather laughable incidents attending their first meeting had made both these young people take an interest in each other that might, under favourable circumstances, develop into a true and ardent passion.

Such eventually was the case; for Guy, who, as you may suppose, had little to do during the long Summer days in that dull country town, devoted all his ingenuity—and it was not small—to devising plans for their meeting. Oppor-

tunities were not wanting, so that before a month had passed over their heads, Guy had decided it was impossible he could live without Mabel ; and she, on her side, was very ready to endorse his opinion.

As far as she was concerned there was no difficulty. She was an orphan, thrown on her own resources to gain her daily bread, with no friends or relations to take an interest in her movements, or oppose themselves to any project she might have in view. With him it was different. Lord Magnum vehemently forbid his son to think of marriage at all at his age, unless with an heiress ; but a governess, and, worse than all, an Irish governess—the very idea was profanation. What was the Magnum blood that flowed in his veins worth, if it could not keep him from that degradation ? It was a futile threat, saying he would cut off his youngest son with a shilling, for there were not many shillings in the family to get, and Beauclerc, as the eldest, of course got them all ; but he might promise his foolish and infatuated boy thus much, that, if he carried out this mad, unheard-

of whim, from that time forth he would be dead to his family, or, rather worse than that, he would be as though he had never existed. His mother wrote to the same effect, in a milder strain; his sister followed suit; but all their remonstrances were thrown away on the blindly-adoring young man. When one is three-and-twenty, and has six hundred a-year besides one's pay, one is not much inclined to give up one's own desires to those of other people, especially in a matter of this kind; the idea of doing so simply never entered into his head, and she thought exactly as he told her. So they were married, and had two very happy years in the old country, during which time baby Cecil was borne, before they were ordered out to India.

They were puzzled then for a little what to do. On the one side India is not thought healthy for children, and what would be the good of taking Cecil out if she had to be sent back in a year or two? But then, on the other hand, they had absolutely no relations in whose care to leave her. Guy's relatives would not own them, and

Mabel had none who could do so. Besides, in any case, they both felt it impossible to part with their pet; so baby sailed with them, to the delight of the regiment, with whom she was a great plaything. All the soldiers doted on the little laughing thing that would come toddling up to them for kind words or rough playthings, fashioned by them in their idle hours; whilst the serjeant-major's wife seemed to consider her almost more her own property than her mother's, and kept the most vigilant watch over her whenever she was not with her parents. The Bengal Presidency was their destination, far up towards the hills; and there they were at the time this story opens, quartered at the little town of Nauooriput.

CHAPTER II.

A TIGER AT HOME.

FOR a few days before this story opens, Marlin, Leveston, Jermyn, and Paget had been on the tip-toe of excitement about a large tiger that was reported to be in the neighbourhood, and which had been committing ravages in the villages round about; at least, so the natives said, though they did not seem able to verify their reports, and it was very clear that, if any damage had been committed, its extent had been greatly exaggerated. However, that mattered nothing to these enthusiastic sportsmen, who engaged one or two of the best native huntsmen about, to track the beast to his lair, and then bring them all necessary in-

formation, besides accompanying them on the expedition.

Only the four named were going. They had decided that the general way of hunting tigers, mounted on elephants, and with a crowd of blacks on foot, was slow. They would take a new and more adventurous line, namely, surrounding the lair, and then walking boldly on till they found the object of their search. Their order of march was to be thus: each officer took a native hunter with him, who, in case of the white man's failing to kill at the first shot, was to come to the rescue with his fire. They did not deem it possible that two should miss, as none but first-rate shots were engaged in this expedition; but, as Major Carter suggested,

"What will happen if both do miss? And, mind, it is a nervous thing, finding oneself face to face with a beast of that kind."

"Oh!" laughed Guy, "the others will be coming up all round; some shot is sure to do for him. It sounds worse than it is. We're all safe, I assure you."

"Well, Leveston, you know your own business best," answered Carter, "but I'd rather it was Anstruther than you who was bound on this mad exploit. Why don't you join them, Anstruther?"

"Oh! they've got enough, and I'd only be in the way," he answered, looking up. He was a tall handsome lad, evidently not long joined. None of his comrades yet knew much of him, as he was of a quiet disposition, in which, however, there was a strong undercurrent of humour; and those who thought him slow were destined, before long, to find out their mistake.

Now he quietly listened to the other's conversation about tigers, only showing he heard what was going on by a slow amused smile when any strange or unsportsman-like notion was evolved from the brain of a new-comer.

"Do you remember, Leveston," said Jermyn (a slight, dapper, fair man, who looked much younger than he really was), "how positive Mr. Percival, the man in the Civil Service, you know, was that there was no such thing as a tiger to be found in this district; they had been

exterminated years ago, he said, and we might wait many a long day before getting a shot at one."

"Very obliging indeed this tiger has been to 'ours,' then," said young Anstruther, joining in the conversation. "I know Percival was right in what he stated, for I have been questioning the natives on the subject, partly with a view to getting myself up in Hindustanee; and they tell me it is ten years since one has been seen in this neighbourhood until now. Are you quite sure these hunter fellows (they belong to the Rajpoot caste, don't they?) are not deceiving you, with a view to getting a good day's pay out of you; and then when the animal does not turn up, telling you he has escaped?"

"No fear of that," answered Captain Marlin; "they know me, and they know, too, precious well that I don't like being trifled with. You'll find it all right, I'm sure, and what a laugh we shall have over that fellow Percival! I wrote and asked him to join us, but I got an answer from him just now, complimenting us on our good fortune, but saying he fears he cannot join

us on that day ; if, however, he finds it possible, he will meet us at the jungle, which is only about four miles from here. We leave this at four, which of course will be nearer half-past ; we reach our rendezvous between half-past five and six ; then we go in for a mild breakfast, before taking up the business of the day. Altogether, I don't think we shall begin our work regularly till seven o'clock, and as jungle walking is very warm, close work, I think that's late enough."

"Warm work it will be, and no mistake, the way you are setting about it," grumbled Major Carter. "I wish to goodness the Colonel would interfere, and forbid it."

"Interfere about what? What is it you wish me to forbid," inquired Colonel Meredith, walking into the room at that instant. "Oh! this tiger hunt. Well, you see I don't quite like to do that, though I consider it an insane project ; but I don't mind telling you to do one thing, and that is, to let those black beggars get the warmest corner in the battue, or whatever you call it, it's the only thing they're fit for, and

they're paid for it." So saying, the Colonel took up a paper and dropped the subject.

Guy Leveston's delight at the prospect of this hunt, and his unwillingness to give it up, can now be understood, and Marlin's impatience, whilst waiting for him, can well be imagined.

"Why, what a time you've been, Leveston!" he exclaimed, as Guy hurriedly scrambled into the buggy beside him. "Fly-by-Night is mad to be off; ain't you, old boy? On with you, then, and go as fast as you like." The nag thus apostrophised, a beautiful grey Arab, laid back his ears, gave a playful jump or two, and then settling to his work, went off like "greased lightning," to use Marlin's expressive phraseology.

"What kept you so long? Only this gee can get along pretty considerable smart, as our friends the Yankees have it, we should be no end behind time."

"Well, I was pretty near playing you false, and not coming at all. My wife has a horror of tiger-hunts—thinks they are dreadfully dangerous; and she was really so anxious about me,

I felt half inclined not to go. I say, would you mind stopping at Menton's bungalow a minute? I'm awfully sorry to delay you, but I promised to leave a message for him."

The message was left, but occasioned a delay of about ten minutes in knocking up some one; and then they sped on their way once more, and made such good going of it that they arrived at the rendezvous as the others were getting out of their buggy.

Jermyn looked as imperturbable as usual.

"By Jove!" he said, going up to Fly-by-Night, "that's a tip-top little animal, as hard as nails. It's a sin to drive him. Why don't you enter him for our races next month, Marlin, and ride him yourself? All the ladies would back you, I know."

"Well, there's only one objection to that plan," replied Marlin, "but it's rather a grave one, and that is, I never could learn to sit on the outside of a horse yet, except in my regulation saddle; and I'd be about the rummest card that has been seen for some time on our course, if I was to try what you suggest. As

to the nag, he's fit enough, but he won't show this turn, I'm afraid, unless you'd like to ride him yourself."

"No, thank you all the same, but I've my own animal. And now hadn't we better be thinking of breakfast? I brought Jacobs with me to settle it; and everything ought to be ready by this time. The blacks are having theirs up at the village—they'll be down to us in half an hour. We'll go in for ours under this banian-tree."

"I'm dying to get off after the tiger," said Paget, speaking for the first time. "This breakfast is an awful bore."

"You must be in an *awful* state of excitement, Paget," observed Marlin. "I don't know that I ever remember hearing you say so many words consecutively before. Leveston, you look dull. What's the matter?"

"Do I?" asked Leveston, smiling; but it was with an effort he did so, for somehow Mabel's words, that had made so little impression on his mind at the time, now returned on him with a kind of deadening, overwhelming

effect. She had said, "I know and feel I shall see your face no more!"

Was this hunt really such a dangerous expedition after all? And if so, ought he, a man with a wife and child, to take part in it? Well, he would be very careful—nothing should happen to him, he was determined. Not for his own sake he resolved thus—he cared as little as any man, less than very many, probably, about personal risk incurred in search of excitement and amusement; but for the sake of the dear little wife at home, who had begged him, with tears and loving words, to take care of himself for her sake. Then the thought flashed across his mind—"What would she do if he were gone? She had no home to which she might return, no friends who would watch over her, and guard her and the little one from the rough usage of the world. He could form some idea of what life would be to him without her; or, rather, could not at all, for when he tried to imagine it, his mind shuddered away from the gloomy picture, and he found some trivial thought flashing across his brain, and

driving out the terrible position he had tried to realise.

And if it was thus cruel, thus hopeless to him, who was a man, and could fight his way, no matter how cold the world was, or how hard the blows it dealt, what would it be to her, the loving and loved one, so tender, so true, so weak, if she were suddenly deprived of his guard and protection, to whom alone she had cared to look for shelter and support.

The air under the gloomy banian seemed to him stifling as he thought over all this, and he wiped his forehead with a dull impatience. Would these fellows never have done their breakfast, and get over the business of the day as quickly as possible? He longed to get back to his wife, and force her to laugh with him at the foolishness of her tears.

"Why, Leveston," remarked Jermyn, "you look pale, and the tiger appears to have had a bad effect on your appetite. Here's Paget, who was swearing at his food a quarter of an hour ago, now going in for it like a good one. I advise you to do the same: fasting never im-

proved a man's shooting yet, you may depend upon it."

"Oh! I'm doing very well," answered Leveston; "but of course I'm a little anxious to come to close quarters with our friend, and really I think it is time we should be stirring; here are our men, too."

On seeing them, the others finished their meal hastily and then set out. There were two or three miles of jungle-walking to be done, before they could approach the thicket in which the tiger's lair was said to be. Still, far off as the spot was, the native hunters were anxious that silence should be observed, as they credit the animal with wonderful powers of hearing, and were trying to surround him before any unusual sounds should awaken his suspicions and put him on the alert.

So they all had time to pursue their respective lines of meditation. Guy's spirits rose, and his thoughts assumed a more cheerful form, now that he was in motion, and marching steadily on the point of danger. Jermyn was longing to get the best chance of a shot, with

the least risk to himself, say when the animal was charging one of his comrades; not that he cared much about his own safety, if he could secure the skin by firing the mortal shot, provided always he escaped with life. Marlin was hoping it would not be long before they came on the brute and did for him. As to who killed it, he didn't much care, though of course he would not object to giving the *coup de grace* himself; only he did hope, as soon as it was all over, his tongue would be let loose, and he would be allowed to question the hunters on their woodcraft, acquire a little of their knowledge, and otherwise extend his stock of information.

As for Paget, he walked stolidly on, cursing the thorns that caught in his clothes, thinking that, as far as he had gone, "the game was not worth the candle," and wondering "what the deuce he joined in the expedition for, except perhaps that it would sound very well, when he went home on leave next year, to talk of the tiger they had killed, and to describe the daring way in which they had hunted it."

They made slow progress through the jungle, and found it decidedly warm walking ; but at last the thicket where “the wild one” took up his abode was reached ; so, halting on the outskirts, they began to make their arrangements for a surround.

Leveston and one native remained where they then were ; Paget with another was to place himself, as nearly as he could judge, opposite to these two, at the further side of the thicket ; whilst the other two pair were to place themselves at equal distances from the first two, and also facing each other, with the clump of jungle and underwood between them.

The native who was told off for Leveston, and who seemed to be some kind of head man over the others, went round with them, and then returned to his post ; but though the thicket was small, such was the caution they were obliged to use in their movements, for fear of alarming the enemy before the time, that nearly three quarters of an hour elapsed before everything was in readiness for their manoeuvre to begin.

The native had named an hour when those he had placed should begin to march forward; and directly Leveston's watch showed that their time had arrived, they set forth.

They moved with extreme precaution, and certainly it seemed at first almost impossible to get through that tangled undergrowth without making some noise that would betray their approach to the watchful adversary.

The hunter however, cautious as he certainly was, did not betray that intense and nervous solicitude about the chance snapping of a branch, or crackling of a dead leaf, which Leveston's recollections of deer-stalking in Scotland led him to think would be exhibited here. On the contrary, though emphatically signing and keeping silence, he took one or two little misadventures that befell Guy with thorough Hindoo apathy, a fact that caused the young English officer to fall into a reverie which had for its subject the difference in their two nations, and the misguided and stolid stupidity of the natives, that prevented a spark of enthu-

siasm being kindled in them by so exciting an enterprise as this.

As he thought thus, he followed mechanically in the shikari's footsteps, never raising his eyes, or, indeed, hardly rendering an account to himself of what he was doing ; for, it must be admitted, Guy had not a little of the dreamer in his composition, and a comparison such as he was making afforded great inducements for intense abstraction.

Fortunately, his absence of mind produced none of the bad results it might have done—such as catching the trigger of his gun in a branch, tumbling over a bough, or otherwise breaking the stillness that reigned around ; but he was greatly puzzled, and had some difficulty in remembering what he was about, when his guide turned hurriedly, and touching him on the shoulder to attract his attention, whispered, with a curious expression of countenance—

“ See, sahib—him there—under the tree. Can the sahib see him ? ”

It was very odd, but at this minute something in the man's face gave Guy the idea that

he was laughing at him ; and perhaps this idea would have caused Leveston to question him as to the reason for such untimely merriment, but for the fact that just then, looking in the direction to which the hunter pointed, he, for the first time in his life, found himself in the presence of a tiger in his native jungle.

For it was true, as Mr. Percival had said, and Anstruther had repeated, for many years no tiger had been seen in that district ; and since he had landed in India, Leveston had not had an opportunity of seeking him in his more favoured haunts. Now he saw before him, through the flickering screen of leaves, the tawny form of the wild beast, crouched under a large tree that raised itself over a pile of rocks and *débris*, among which, no doubt, was the animal's den. The daylight, pouring down now through the overhanging boughs, flecked its sleek striped hide with bright patches, as it lay in a crouching attitude, as though about to spring, with its head resting on its paws. Its side was turned to Leveston, presenting a splendid mark for a shot ; but yet he did not

appear in a hurry to fire. His instincts, acquired in sport at home, forbade him to shoot whilst the animal lay so unconscious and quiet before him.

How long he would have continued gazing, and how long the animal would have preserved its ominous tranquillity, which struck the beholder with a sense of quiet power, Guy could never tell, for just at that minute Marlin, who, positive in most things, and rash in everything, had insisted on walking first during his progress through the jungle, suddenly appeared on the edge of the underwood that bordered the little open space occupied by the rocky mound and tree at the foot of which the tiger was lying. He had hardly stepped into the open ground when he became aware of the foe before him ; but instead of raising his gun at once, he (Leveston thought from the same causes that held himself back) remained standing motionless, watching the wild beast with fascinated eyes ; whilst it, without moving, or in any way changing its position, began slowly and ominously to wag its tail from side to side

very slightly, as cats do when about to spring. At the same time, a rustling in the bushes on the opposite side announced the approach of Paget and his guide, whose appearance might be expected in that direction.

“Fire—fire now, sahib,” whispered the native to Guy hurriedly ; “ the tiger—him spring soon. Dis your best time, sahib.”

Thus urged, Leveston raised his rifle, took careful aim behind the shoulder, and fired. For a second or two nothing could be seen under or about the tree, at the foot of which Guy’s shot must have worked deadly execution, to judge by the intense stillness that succeeded the crack of the rifle. As the smoke slowly cleared off, Guy, to his astonishment, and perhaps also with a little indignation, saw a tall form bending over the prostrate animal—for prostrate it certainly was, and did not seem to have moved after the shot, beyond turning on its side in the death-struggle.

“ Which of these fellows can it be,” thought Leveston, “ who is so rash and so cool as to go up to my game and handle it before I have

had a chance of looking at it myself? It can't be Marlin, for there he is, just where I saw him last. He's coming forward now, however, and there's Paget opposite to me. This must be Jermyn, then; cool hand he is, decidedly. But no, it's too tall. Who on earth can it be?"

As these reflections passed through Guy's mind, he stepped out boldly towards the dead tiger and the unknown, who was now standing with his back turned towards him. When he was within four or five yards of the stranger, however, the latter suddenly turned, and said, in Anstruther's quiet manner, and with his half-formed, humorous smile,

"By Jove! Leveston, you've done for him this time; he's as dead as a door-nail! A beautiful aim it was, too—I never saw a better."

Guy was so, dumbfounded at this unexpected apparition that he never thought of looking at his game, but exclaimed,

"You here, Anstruther? In the name of all that's wonderful, how did you manage that? And I don't think it was quite fair of you to

join our hunt without telling us. Did any of the others know you were coming?"

"Hulloa, Anstruther, this is a pretty piece of work!" cried Marlin, now coming up. "Do you know, sir, I'm not at all sure I won't have you put under arrest for disrespect to your commanding officers. The service is going to the dogs, indeed, when a young jackanapes like you thinks he can play off his schoolboy pranks on men of double his experience and standing."

"But what is it, Marlin?" asked Paget, hurrying up. "Anstruther has no business here, certainly; but no harm is done, as the tiger is dead, and it was Leveston shot it."

"Leveston shot it!" roared Marlin, whilst Anstruther, who up to this time had stood by silently, with an amused smile, now turned away, and fairly shook with suppressed merriment. "Confound you! where are your eyes, or, if you have any, why don't you use them? Do you see any blood on the ground? Look at the beast; how long has it been dead? Leveston shot it, indeed! There's his mark," kicking the body contemptuously as he spoke; "but it

didn't want that to make it harmless enough. Such a confounded, bat-eyed, dull-brained, impossible set of asses as you fellows I never came across; and if Mr. Anstruther thinks I'm like the rest of you, and will take this kind of thing, he has made a little mistake I'll enlighten him about, I can tell him. I say, Jermyn, here you are. What do you say to this, I should like to know?"

Jermyn, who hurried up greatly out of breath, vexed with himself for having missed the opportunity of the first shot, knowing nothing of what had happened, and thinking Marlin was raging against the successful hunter, said looking from one to another, without glancing at this new version of the apple of discord lying at their feet,

"Gently, Marlin; it can't be helped now, and it wasn't his fault if you weren't up in time."

"His fault!" shouted Marlin, white with rage, and striking the butt of his rifle violently on the ground. "Heaven help me! I shall go mad amongst such a set of drivelling idiots as I see round me. Haven't you, one of you, the sense

to see that that young ass there"—pointing to Anstruther—"has been making game of us, his superior officers, by getting up a sham hunt, and setting up an old, rotten, stuffed skin for us to shoot at, like boys trying their guns for the first time?"

"Well, I declare, so it is!" answered Paget, craning forward his neck, and looking for the first time at the beast before them. "It's only a stuffed tiger, after all, and when we took so much trouble to creep through the jungle quietly, we might have walked anyway, and made as much noise as we liked, and it wouldn't have mattered. Still, as you say, Marlin, it was very disrespectful of Anstruther—very. I think we might even call it insubordinate. Put it down as insubordination," he added, glancing absently at his native, and speaking as though he was issuing directions to the clerk at a court-martial.

"Nonsense!" interrupted Marlin angrily, "don't make a greater fool of yourself, Paget, than nature has already done; but we must come to the bottom of this, don't you think so,

Leveston? and when we know what he has to say for himself, we will talk about what punishment he must get. For you know this kind of thing can't be let go on; it would destroy all discipline in a regiment if the youngsters were allowed to amuse themselves by making fun of their seniors."

Guy looked at Anstruther, and saw that, though he had flushed a little at Captain Marlin's overbearing manner, he was far from being alarmed, and even his old half smile seemed to hover over his face as he met Leveston's eye.

The latter was certainly nettled and annoyed at what had taken place; he did not like being made fun of a bit better than anybody else, and he could not help thinking how often Anstruther must have laughed in his sleeve when he heard them discussing their plans for slaying the tiger, and their evident appreciation of the wonderful amount of courage they fancied they displayed in attacking so dangerous an animal in such an unguarded manner. Besides, now he thought of it, this disclosure accounted for the half smile on the face of the native

hunter when they entered the thicket. Yes, these black beggars had been in the secret too, and vastly they must have amused themselves with it. Certainly the whole thing was too bad, and the young fellow who concocted it deserved the knout, if such punishment were the fashion in an English regiment. As it was, he supposed they would have to content themselves with putting him in Coventry for a time, or showing their disapprobation of his performance in some equally marked and uncomfortable manner. However, the pith of the whole matter, as it now flashed through Guy's mind, was that there had been no danger after all, and Mabel's dream was as foolish as most things of the kind usually are. How she would laugh with joy and delight when she saw him safe back, and heard of the trick that had been played on them! As the thought of her smiling face rose before him, more merciful ideas came into his mind with regard to the culprit; and indeed the lad's smile had faded away, and he began to look very grave as he saw nothing but stern faces around him, and realized for the first time that his joke

might have more serious consequences than he had foreseen.

Noticing this, and with his heart still full of kindly feelings, called there by recollections of Mabel, Leveston answered,

"I think you are right, Marlin. We must hear what put this foolish prank into Anstruther's head; for it was a silly trick, though no doubt well and carefully executed. Ah! boy," he continued kindly, "if you only put the same skill and perseverance into your duty as you have done into this, you will be a great man some day."

Anstruther's dark troubled eyes lightened at these kind words, and he answered,

"Thank you, Mr. Leveston; I fear I have got myself into a greater scrape than I intended, and one that you won't easily forget or forgive. I didn't mean to do anything that would annoy you so much as this I now see has done; but don't you remember the other day how Mr. Percival, at our mess, sneered at the ignorance of the military, because some of us talked of getting tiger-hunting up here. He was an

underbred fellow certainly, but he gave himself such airs of superiority, and talked in such a positive manner of the impossibility of getting a tiger here, where none had been seen for years, that I thought it would be fine fun to get up a hunt, the report of which should reach him, and the skin procured in which hunt could, after being dressed, be shown to him as a trophy. Of course I knew we could not manage such a hunt in the usual way, with elephants and an army of natives, but knowing these four men pretty well, and seeing that for a little money they could be induced to work the project and keep it secret, I resolved on trying what might be accomplished. With some difficulty I got my tiger from Calcutta, and last night succeeded in placing it here without exciting suspicion. I arrived here about half an hour before you this morning, fixed a wire to the animal's tail, the end of which wire I took with me, when I climbed into the tree to wait your coming; and this wire it was which enabled me to imitate the movement of the tail when the creature is about to spring. I let

none of you, or indeed anyone except these four natives, into the secret, because I feared, if you knew the truth, you would either display not enough enthusiasm, or too much; and I wished particularly Mr. Percival should be so far taken in as to believe, what I think he now does believe, that the hunters have been deceiving you with a view to making money out of you, and that when you come to the place they will say some noise has disturbed the tiger, and that he has made his escape. Now you can spread abroad everywhere the report that you have killed your game. You, Leveston, shot it, and when the skin can be supposed perfectly dry, you can invite everyone about to a grand luncheon, and display your trophy in triumph."

"I'll be shot if that's a bad idea!" shouted Marlin, delightedly. "Anstruther, my boy, shake hands and be friends. I'm sorry for all I said just now, and I'd do anything to take a rise out of that mean brute Percival. I'll tell him, I know, why he has never seen a tiger in this neighbourhood is because he never cared to look for one. I say, can we depend on these

niggers? — they won't peach, you think?"

"No, they're all right," answered Anstruther, now quite at ease again, as he saw his plan adopted and about to be carried out. "We'll leave the beast in care of this fellow," indicating the chief shikari; "he'll put him back in the case he came in, and send him to me; in due course of time we will produce him, saying we sent him to Calcutta to be stuffed, and that he has just returned."

"How Percival will swear, when we come down on him with such a very tangible proof of the existence of the animal in this neighbourhood he was so positive couldn't be found here!" said Jermyn; "it will be great fun seeing his face; and we will forgive your ruse, Anstruther, as it enables us to take the change out of him."

"Yes, we'll forgive him this time," chimed in Paget; "but I would call it insubordination, for all that."

"I saw, the minute I came into the open space, something queer was the matter," continued Marlin, "and that's the reason I didn't

fire when I first caught sight of the animal. However, we'll give you the credit of having shot him, Leveston, and you will make a great name for yourself as a mighty hunter."

"It is, perhaps, just as well for us, after all, we were deceived in this way," added Jermyn; "for do you know, now I come to look at the brute, it seems to me we had engaged ourselves in a far more dangerous enterprise than we were at all aware of. But now I suppose our hunt is over for the day, and we had better return to Náúooriput. How astonished some of our friends will be when we all return safe and sound, and a little disappointed too, I think; it seemed to rational mortals such a glorious opening for steps! They will be wanting to see the skin; we must make up some story about having left it with this brave fellow here, who we can say is going to Calcutta soon, and will prepare it, and take it with him to be stuffed."

All this being arranged, the party set out on their return to the village, where their traps awaited them; and a very noisy party it was, the thought of the trick they were about to

play on Percival, and an unacknowledged feeling, with at least some of the party, that they had escaped a very great danger, contributed not a little to this hilarity; add to which, the morning, though piping hot, was gloriously beautiful, and five young fellows, with no trouble weighing on their minds, generally manage to get up a good deal of boisterous fun, when they find themselves together, without the restraining influence of the other sex.

As for Guy, he had never felt so happy and light-hearted; he had not yielded to his wife's request to the letter, it is true, but circumstances had allowed, or rather forced him to obey the spirit of it. He forgot that the merit of this acquiescence did not belong to him, and complimented himself on it accordingly. His spirits rose higher and higher with each step on his homeward way; he laughed and jested, and trolled out snatches of merry song, till his companions were as "fey" as himself; and Anstruther, the culprit, who should have been in blackest disgrace, capped his *bon mots*, put a second to his songs, mooted the maddest pro-

jects, and told the most extravagant stories, till the jungle echoed again with their boyish uproar.

At the village they all got into their respective traps, but even then could not make up their minds to separate, and drove off along the glaring, dusty road together, Anstruther riding beside them on his wild black Arab, so well known to all the regiment by its very appropriate name of Shaitan; and certainly a madder pair of young devils never careered along a burning Indian road than that nag and his master that sultry Summer morning.

The barracks were reached at last, but not till nearly one o'clock, so that between fun and heat the hunters were nearly worn out as they dispersed each to their respective quarters; and Guy, with a happy heart, turned to seek his wife, and tell her the results of their expedition.

CHAPTER III.

THE DREAM FULFILLED.

GUY hurried to his quarters with glad impatience, anxious to tell his laughable adventure, and prove how little cause Mabel had for feeling the intense alarm that had agitated her previous to his departure ; but as he threw open the door and entered their little sitting-room, noisily enough, it must be allowed, a dark figure rose from an arm-chair, and advancing towards him, revealed to his instantly-alarmed perceptions the well-known face of Dr. Menton.

“Why, what is the matter, doctor?” he gasped, a sudden horror taking possession of him at the sight of the Medico’s unusually

solemn expression. "Mabel is not ill, surely? She was a little nervous and feverish when I left; but it cannot be anything serious. Just tell me, for mercy's sake, there is nothing to be alarmed at!"

The doctor's usually careless, good-humoured face darkened, and his lips quivered, as he saw the terrified, pleading expression on his interlocutor's countenance, and knew that, instead of comforting, he must deal a yet keener blow than the poor young man had realized as possible. Twice he tried to speak, but his dry lips refused to utter a sound—only by the quivering of his features and the spasmodic contraction of the muscles of the throat, he who looked so eagerly for encouragement saw that there was a yet deeper woe in store for him than he had imagined.

"Is there no hope?" he gasped at length; and his voice sounded only a gurgling whisper in the ears of the man before him. "No hope!" he cried wildly, as a motion of the doctor's head conveyed the fearful truth to his agonised mind. "My God! my God! what have I done

that this should come upon me? The cup is too bitter—I will not drink it! Doctor, you must cure her—I will not let her die! Why do you wait here? Come and attend to her! You are losing time telling me this! Come and help me to save her!” So saying he seized Menton’s arm, and dragged him to the door of the sleeping apartment, which communicated by a short passage with the sitting-room.

But the doctor held him back firmly, and at last found voice to speak.

“Leveston, my poor fellow, while there is life there is hope—with her there is no hope.”

“No hope!” Guy repeated, looking with a dull vacant stare at the doctor’s mournful face, and standing for a second or two, as though turned into stone. “No hope!” he reiterated at length—“then she is dead!” And as he spoke he seated himself moodily, with his head bent forward, his hands hanging down, his whole body and attitude like that of a man deaf, and dumb, and dead, in whom the whole hope and interest of life had been cut down at one fell blow.

Frightened as the doctor had been of his task before he undertook it, he was now even more alarmed, for the whole appearance of the man indicated a mental paralysis, from which Menton knew by experience it might be almost impossible to rouse him.

“He must come in and see her as soon as everything is ready,” thought the kind-hearted physician; “nothing but a shock of that kind will rouse him from this death-like stupor. I will speak to him, and see if I can attract his attention in that way.”

He called him by name—gently at first, then in a louder and more peremptory manner; but no movement on the part of the motionless figure before him betrayed any interest, or even any power of hearing in the stricken man.

“Do you not wish to hear anything about her death—how it happened?” continued Dr. Menton kindly, but with determination; for he felt that, to arouse his friend, pain must be inflicted, and he would not shrink from doing so when he knew it was the only way in which ultimate relief could be obtained.

Still no answer, only Guy's eyelids trembled for one brief instant, as the worthy man spoke of her death; and with a sigh the doctor prepared for what he would fain have spared himself—an account of how the young and lovely Mabel Leveston met her death.

“I sent up the draught as desired,” he began, “very soon after you left. It was delivered to the native woman who generally waited on Mrs. Leveston. This woman, seeing her mistress was asleep when the medicine arrived, and not wishing to disturb her, placed it in a cupboard along with a number of other bottles. Amongst these was a mixture of arsenic and other poisons, used for preparing skins, I believe. This mixture resembled that which I had sent to Mrs. Leveston, and though the bottle of arsenic was labelled poison, yet the native, not being able to read, took no notice of it; and when Mrs. Leveston, on awaking, sent her for the draught, the ayah poured it from the wrong bottle, and brought it to her mistress, who drank it at once, and then exclaimed—‘I am sure there is something wrong

in that; it is not at all like the last I took. Bring me the bottle.' The bottle was brought, and on finding what she had taken the unfortunate lady sent at once for me. I was out somewhere about the place, and though I came the minute the message reached me, it was too late—all was over, and I could only remain here to meet you, and try to break the terrible news to you, though I fear, my poor friend, I have been of no use in softening the blow."

Here the kind-hearted man laid his hand on Leveston's arm, who, during the whole recital, had sat as if carved in stone, apparently hearing and seeing nothing, and who now allowed the doctor to touch him without evincing a knowledge of the fact in any manner whatsoever.

The good man was really puzzled; in all his experience, so painful and embarrassing a case had never come under his notice. He feared to bring Leveston into the presence of the body of her whom he so deeply loved, lately so blooming with life and beauty, now cold, and calm, and still as a marble statue. He

dreaded the effect the sight might have on the poor widower's already over-wrought and despairing mind ; whilst, at the same time, he half believed such a course would be necessary to rouse him from the stupor into which he seemed to have fallen. Again and again this true friend spoke to the poor bereaved man, who never moved, never answered, never showed by any look or sign that he was conscious of the other's presence. So the day dragged slowly along in the darkened room, the doctor sitting patiently beside the spirit-stricken man, whom he dared not leave, lest, in the depth of his despair, he might be tempted to lay violent hands on that life given him by the Creator, which the Creator alone has the right to quench.

Then, after some hours' weary watching, when Menton saw all his efforts were unavailing, and knew that in the next room the body had been carefully attended to by sorrowing hands (some of the soldiers' wives, with whom Mrs. Leveston was a great favourite, had volunteered this service), he raised Guy from his chair, and con-

ducted his tottering, unconscious footsteps to the bedside.

But the sad sight there presented to them fell on vacant, unheeding eyes. He did not seem to recognize the marble, wax-like loveliness before him as all that now remained of what had been dearer even than life to his young and hopeful heart. His glance rested on it for a minute only, with a dull, unmeaning gaze: then he spoke for the first time for many hours.

"It is cold here," he said, with a shudder, "let us return to the other room."

So he was led back again, leaning heavily on the shoulder of his guide, and apparently bereft of all his senses; for when the doctor accidentally led him too near a table that lay in the way, he staggered blindly against it, and would have fallen had he not been held; and when the table upset with a loud crash, the noise drew from him no comment, and Menton could only suppose he had not heard it.

What was to be done? The good doctor was at his wits' end, when he suddenly remembered the Colonel was a great friend of the bereaved

man, and words of comfort coming from him might have more softening power than from anyone else. He accordingly despatched a message requesting Colonel Meredith to call; and he, who, on hearing what had happened, had remained about the barracks, in case he might be of use, speedily answered the summons. He waited outside and sent in for the doctor, anxious to hear from him any suggestions as to what he should do or say.

"I called here once or twice before," he added, "but every time the servants told me you were with him, and must not be disturbed."

Menton then described Leveston's state, and the measures he had taken to rouse him from so dangerous a stupor. Colonel Meredith listened attentively. When the doctor had finished speaking, he answered.

"There is only one thing now can save him—it is the child. She is with Mrs. Archer, the Serjeant-Major's wife, just now. I will go and fetch her. He must not be told she is coming. The greater the surprise the greater chance of

the plan succeeding. From what you tell me, I think he must have forgotten her very existence."

And so saying, Colonel Meredith hurried off in search of the child, whilst the doctor returned to his patient.

Cecil Leveston was, as Colonel Meredith had said, with Mrs. Archer, playing with her children, and making herself extremely happy. She was considerably over three years of age, indeed nearer four, and from seeing so many people constantly around her, had none of the shyness generally exhibited by children of that age. Accordingly, Colonel Meredith, who was her godfather, and of whom she was excessively fond, had no difficulty in inducing her to leave her playmates, and come with him to see papa. She put on her little hat, and trotted off by his side with an air of confidence that, under other circumstances, would have provoked a smile from the usually gay Colonel. The child's tongue rattled on merrily, telling of all she had done and played that day with the little Archers; but her companion was unusually

silent, as he thought of that broken-hearted, despairing man who must live desolate and lonely for ever more. Not that the Colonel was more sentimental than most men, and did not recognize very clearly the fact that more than half the people in this world get over such a sorrow in time, and love as heartily and live as merrily with the new love as they ever did with the old. But some subtle instinct seemed to warn him that his friend Leveston was not a man of that stamp—that rather he belonged to the minority who, when they do love, fling away their heart at once and for ever, as a gift that loses its value if taken back and bestowed a second time.

When they reached the door of the room, Meredith opened it gently, and pushing in the child before him, whispered,

“Run and speak to papa, Cecil—he is sick.”

Cecil was passionately fond of her parents, who had indeed made her their pet and plaything all her short life; she was besides a compassionate, loving little soul. No sooner did she hear her father was sick than she ran to him,

and reaching her little arms around his neck, kissed him, with childlike pertinacity, again and again. As she passed her arms round him he shuddered, but raising one of the hands that until now had hung listless by his side, he gathered her to him with a passionate determination that spoke volumes to those looking on. He never looked at her or spoke, only he held her, and his clasp seemed to say: "This is all that is left to me, and I will keep it while I live!"

The child was quiet for a minute, resting her head on his shoulder; then, with one of those sudden flashes of thought so common to children, she exclaimed, in her clear ringing voice,

"Papa, where is mamma? I want to go to her. Let me go to mamma." As she spoke, she struggled to free herself from his embrace; but he started, like one awaking from a dream, and catching her in his arms, cried, with an exceeding great and bitter cry,

"Child, child, you have no mother! You are all that is left me; we will never part again!"

And, bowing his head on her young bright curls, he wept the bitter agonizing tears of a strong man for the love of his life, passed away too soon.

The child lay quiet in his arms; she was half frightened at his wild outburst, but she felt that it was papa, and she was safe with him; only at length she whispered, smoothing his hair with tiny caressing hands,

“Don’t cry any more, papa, and Cecil will be very good. Cecil was not naughty to-day. Mrs. Archer said so.”

Her caressing action, and little tender frightened words, recalled him to himself. He recovered himself; by a violent effort but the brief outburst had saved him—he seemed sensible, and begged the doctor to leave Cecil with him. “I will take care of her,” he said, “but I cannot let her out of my sight now; she is all I have left.”

When the Colonel and Dr. Menton left Levoston’s quarters, they congratulated each other on the success of their last idea. That it was indeed which had saved him in the present;

"and it is she alone," added the Colonel, "who will save him in the future from becoming a morose, broken-hearted man. We must manage somehow for him to keep the little one with him. He can have the married quarters he has got at present, and when we go elsewhere I am sure we shall all be ready to make such arrangements as will enable them to keep together. He can keep the child's own ayah at present if he likes, and turn one of his rooms into a nursery. That's the only way I see to keep the poor fellow from losing his senses outright."

"I agree with you," added the doctor. "At least for some time it would not do, to suggest his separating from the child. I could not answer for the consequences; and besides, I don't think he has any home to which he could send her."

Thus it was settled that Cecil should remain with the regiment—at least until further orders; and the poor father, after the funeral, which took place next day, devoted himself entirely to the little one, seeming to take no

pleasure in anything, unless she was by his side; so that her merry face and curly hair soon became as well known throughout the regiment as the square, broad-shouldered form of the oldest veteran among them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEEN OF THE REGIMENT.

OF course as soon as Jermyn, Paget, Marlin, and Anstruther had separated from Leveston, on their return from the tiger-hunt, they heard of the sad loss that had befallen their friend and comrade. The three first-named were, no doubt, greatly shocked, and felt deeply for the bereaved man, but their feelings were very different from those of Anstruther, who could not help blaming himself for being in some measure connected with the dreadful event, by having originated and got up, the hunt, the fear of which had at first alarmed, and, through that alarm, been so fatal to Mrs. Leveston. He was not of a very communicative

nature, and so kept his thoughts and feelings entirely to himself, turning over incessantly in his mind whether Guy recognized his unwilling complicity in the dreadful catastrophe, and whether, if he did so, he would for ever shun the attentions and society of the self-condemning young man.

For Anstruther was anxious to be of use, and offer what consolation the truest friend can afford in such a moment; very little indeed that is, we all know and feel, but still the mere sensation that human love and care are around the sufferer, and are watching over him, has been often in the past, and will be again and again in the future, the best solace and comfort of an aching troubled heart.

As he watched the heart-broken, stricken man at the funeral, he longed to venture near him, yet dared not. "If I could only find out," he thought, "whether he remembers what share I had in the matter, I could better tell how to act. Now I fear to approach him, as the sight of me may cause him more pain than all my sympathy can ever efface. I think I will ask

Menton how far Leveston recollects what took place before this, and whether he would like to see me." So the young fellow went to Menton, and confided to him all his doubts and difficulties, his remorse and anguish at his share in this misery.

"Nonsense, man," said the good doctor, roughly, but kindly; "you must not look at the matter in that light. It is true you were, as it happens, unfortunately for you in this instance, the promoter of the hunt; and, in all probability, had the hunt never been talked of, Mrs. Leveston would still be alive; but though it might not have happened on the day it did, still, as you are well aware, Leveston was only waiting for an opportunity of joining in a tiger-hunt, and the same chance of circumstances would then probably have followed as did now; therefore I cannot see that blame can be attached to you either by yourself or others. You were merely an instrument in the hands of Providence, and if Leveston thinks of your share in the matter at all, I am sure it is in that light that he regards it."

"It is very good of you, doctor," replied Anstruther, "to try and relieve my mind in that way; but though, as you say, only an instrument, I cannot dispel the feeling that I, the unconscious agent, may be an object of distrust and aversion to the sufferer, and all the unavailing repentance I feel, and that time will never efface, may not move him to take me as the friend and companion I would wish to be to him. Oh! doctor, what a lesson this has been to me, never to trifle with the fears of others. I, as well as the rest of us, was aware that Mrs. Leveston was nervous and anxious about her husband's participation in this expedition, and by a few words I could have quieted her fears, and in all human probability avoided all this. As it was, I only laughed at her anxiety when I heard it spoken of, knowing well how futile it was. I was heartless to do so, and severely I have been punished."

"Well, well, lad," answered the doctor, "I think you are too hard on yourself; but I will mention you before the poor fellow, and see how he takes it. I feel sure the idea of your

having any participation in his cruel trouble has never entered his head."

And so it was as the doctor had thought. Poor Leveston was far too absorbed in his sorrow to remember in any way Anstruther's connection with his grief, and when the remorseful young man came to visit him, received him with the same sad listless manner and broken, disjointed conversation as he did everyone else, hardly interrupting for a minute his efforts to mend some broken toy on which Cecil wished him to try his skill, whilst she stood by, watching his clumsy, indifferent movements with eager, expectant eyes.

"Let me see what I can do, Leveston?" asked Anstruther, earnestly. In so small a thing as this even, he was anxious to help and please the man who suffered through his means; and the toy being handed over to him with a confession of his stupidity about such things by Guy, the little article—a wooden horse and cart—was speedily set to rights, and restored to its owner, who raised her dark eyes to his face, with a grave, confident expression, as she

said, "Very nice. Thank you, man. What's your name? Mine's Baby Cecil."

"My name is Gerald Anstruther," he answered, taking her on his knee, and smoothing down her sunny brown hair. "Try and say it after me. That's right. We'll be great friends, won't we, little queen?"

"Baby's friends with everybody," the little one answered, nodding her head gravely, and with quite a dignified air. "But what did you call me that name for? I told you my name. Did you forget it? I won't forget yours."

"I called you a little queen, because that's a nice name; but I know your own too. Are there any more toys to mend?"

"Oh, yes—yes!" she cried, slipping off his knee joyfully. "Papa, mayn't Gewald mend dolly?—you couldn't do it this morning, you know."

Leveston smiled faintly, and looked at Anstruther.

"Does the little one bore you?" he asked; "you see she has taken cool possession of your name already. Call him Mr. Anstruther, Cecil."

"That's too hard for baby," she answered ;
"I shall call this nice man Gewald always, if
he mends dolly. Will you do it?"

"Yes, bring it here," he replied ; "and, Leveston, let her call me what she likes ; she's a little pet, and I want to be friends with her."

"You'll find her rather too friendly before long," said Guy, as the child returned, carrying a very scantily-dressed doll, from the right leg of which a constant stream of sawdust escaped, promising the speedy death of dolly from rapid consumption. This handsome individual was carried by its head, as the manner of children is to carry dolls ; it was also entirely destitute of hair ; so begrimed that it might have been meant for a coalheaver, and, above all, minus one eye. Yet its mistress held it up for inspection, with the intense satisfaction children always exhibit in such disreputable articles, and laying it on Anstruther's knee, she proceeded to point out the hole that required mending.

"Hulloa !" cried Anstruther, "this is indeed a serious business ; it is a case of needle and thread, I see ; get me them from your ayah,

little one, and I will soon set this lady to rights."

The needle was brought, and with the gravest and most important air, the dashing subaltern, who would certainly have felt more at home at a review on the parade ground, or taking a racing gallop on Shaitan, bent all his energies to the successful accomplishment of the work before him; whilst Leveston looked on, more roused and brightened up than he had been for the whole sad fortnight since his wife's death.

"What a good-natured fellow you are, Anstruther!" he exclaimed, as the young fellow put the finishing touch to the doll, and handed it back to its delighted mistress; "you will quite oust our Sergeant-Major in her regard. She used to think there was no one like Archer for mending damaged articles."

"Archer's very good, papa, and I like him very much; but he's cross to Jack and Kitty sometimes, and then I get frightened. Are you ever cross, Gewald?"

As she said this, she leaned against his knee,

looking up into his face with her curious grave eyes.

He laughed a little, looking at Leveston, who watched him with a half-amused look as he answered,

"I daresay I'm often what you would call cross, with stupid men, but never with a good little girl; so mind you're good always, little queen, and then I'll never be cross."

"Oh, I'm always good," Cecil answered, with a little self-satisfied toss of her head; "only sometimes Baba's naughty, you know, and then she always thinks it's me."

"I see," laughed Anstruther; "well, I hope I shan't be naughty, and then we shall get on very well together. I'll give you a ride some day, if you come out with me."

And so Anstruther and Cecil became very good friends; whilst Leveston, pleased at the notice the little one excited, took rather more interest in the young man, and evinced more pleasure in his companionship than he had shown in that of anyone else—not even excepting his old friend the Colonel. Anstruther, how-

ever, was not the only one who made much of the child. All the officers, more or less, and, above all, the Colonel, who, as her godfather, considered himself to have a vested right in her, exerted their utmost ingenuity to spoil her, and turn her gay excitable little head with their petting and caresses.

"I'll tell you what it is," Marlin was overheard saying, in his vehement rattling manner, "that child of Leveston's is the jolliest little thing going. She's about the nicest kid I've seen for a long time. What do you think she said to me yesterday when I was there? Her father went out of the room, to fetch something he wanted to show, and presently this little urchin trotted in, calling out, 'Papa, where are you?' Then seeing only me, she went on, 'What do you want, man? Can you button my boots? Gewald does it for me.' I thought this rather good, but before I had time to think about it, she clambered on to a chair beside me, and put one foot coolly on my knee. I suppose I was a little awkward about it, though I bungled through one, and had begun the other before

she observed, ‘ You’re very stupid, man; Gewald does it much quicker.’ I daresay he does, for I’m sure the little lady gives him enough practice at it, and I don’t think anyone could refuse her anything. I couldn’t. She has such a delightful, imperious, coaxing little way of ordering you about.”

If these were the sentiments of the officers, those of the soldiers were even more enthusiastic. They absolutely idolised the bright little beauty who smiled on them so gaily whenever she met them. Through her friendship with the Sergeant-major’s wife and family, she knew most of them by name, and would, no matter with whom she was walking, shout rapturously, “ Oh, there’s Millar ! How do you do, Millar ? ” or Evans, or Butler, as the case might be ; at which the favoured individual would salute, if she was in company with his officers, smiling at the same time with delight at this public recognition ; and if she was with her ayah, he would have to be busy indeed if he did not make a few minutes delay in order to inquire after the little Missy’s health and general well-being.

Soon a favourite and recognised amusement was taking short rides, mounted before Anstruther, her father, or any of the other officers who felt inclined to give her a canter, on their return from their morning or evening ride ; and at last Colonel Meredith announced at mess one evening that the regiment had decided she must have a pony, which, with her father's permission, he would present to her on her fifth birthday, now rapidly approaching, as this conversation occurred nearly a year after her mother's death.

Accordingly, the country was scoured for a pony, and Cecil—who of course, it had been decided, was to know nothing about it, and who equally of course dragged it all out of Marlin as soon as she knew there was anything to find out—lived in the wildest state of excitement, keeping a sharp look-out for the most wretched and ill-conditioned screws, which she invariably pronounced to be “little darlings,” whilst for more well-favoured animals she cherished an undisguised contempt, Shaitan being the only creature with the least pretensions to good

looks for which she professed a liking. She also particularly requested that her steed might have a bright scarlet mane and tail, after the native fashion ; but this was too much for Colonel Meredith.

"Look here, little Queen," he said, when she proffered this request (they had all got into a habit of calling her so, from Anstruther) "I promised you a decent, Christian-looking pony, and you shall have one, if it can be got ; but you wouldn't surely like to go about like a nasty black ; and besides, you'd be the laughing-stock of the whole regiment."

"Oh ! no, I wouldn't," she answered. "They like me so, they wouldn't laugh at me ; and I would so like to have his main and tail scarlet ; only if you don't like it I'll try and not wish for it any more."

"That's right, Pet," answered Meredith ; "you wouldn't like, Leveston, to see the little woman going out such a guy, I'm sure !"

"No indeed. I think, darling, you'll have to be content with a horse like ours. We don't have scarlet wonders to carry us, and you must do as we do."

So that matter was settled; and when the expected pony arrived, in the shape of the loveliest little grey Arab possible to imagine, the child's delight knew no bounds. It was perfectly gentle, and would eat bread and lumps of sugar out of her hands, yet was withal of a very vivacious temper, requiring plenty of good riding, which, after a few lessons from her father and sometimes Anstruther, Cecil was soon able to give it, as she had a natural innate love of riding, all a child's daring, and happy ignorance of danger.

When she was about five years old, Leveston, who had just obtained his company, thought it high time she should begin to learn something. Accordingly lessons became the order of the day, and he, though knowing very little about teaching, yet applied himself very earnestly to the task of making her read. This the little woman did not quite approve of; and one day, hearing the Colonel ask for her as he was setting off for a ride, and on her father's answering that she was at her lessons, his exclaiming, "Oh! never mind them, Leveston, yet awhile; she's

too young for work ; it's nonsense bothering about that kind of thing just yet," she, on the next favourable opportunity—namely, when she thought her lesson a little harder than usual—said,

"It's too difficult, papa, I can't learn it ; and besides, Colonel Meredith says it's nonsense making me work so hard."

"My dear child," Leveston answered, with outward firmness, though inwardly he was agitated with a number of new and painful feelings, amongst which the fear predominated, that if it came to a struggle for mastery between them, the child would probably gain the victory, because he had not the courage to annoy her, or do anything that could arouse in her mind distrust or fear of him. "My dear child, you must do as I tell you, and I think it necessary for you to learn this. Come, try hard, and when you have said it, you shall come for a ride with me. Sultan is waiting for you."

Poor Leveston, he was trying to bribe her by the promise of a ride, and so get over his difficulties ; but Cecil had made up her mind for a

struggle, and being backed up by the Colonel, felt strong enough to give her father battle, so she replied,

"I can't, papa, I told you so; and god-papa says it's nonsense, so I know I needn't do it. It's very unkind and wicked of you to make me, and I won't do it either. Nasty, horrid, crabbed book!" she continued, flinging her book on the floor, and stamping on it in a paroxysm of rage. Her father, terrified and startled at this new phase in his pet's character, drew back pained and grieved, not knowing what course he had best pursue, when, silently and suddenly, Colonel Meredith walked into the room.

"Oh! what's this?" he cried, finding himself face to face with Cecil, who looked, with her dishevelled hair, flashing eyes, and crimson cheeks, like the embodiment of some lovely but malignant fairy. "This surely can't be our Cecil?—the Plunger's Pet, the Queen of the Regiment. Impossible! we none of us know her, and wouldn't own her like that."

"You said it was nonsense, god-papa," she answered, turning eagerly to him, and kicking

the book as it lay at her feet with a contemptuous gesture ; "and so I told papa I wouldn't do it, and I won't either !"

Quite dumbfounded at this sudden appeal to him, Meredith stood for a moment gazing at the child ; then turning and meeting Leveston's eye, he burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"By Jove !" he exclaimed, when he recovered, "my rash words are indeed recoiling on my head with a vengeance ! Don't you know, Cecil, that it's very wrong to behave so to your father ?"

"No, indeed she doesn't," answered Leveston ; "but if you had a proper sense of your duty as her godfather, she would have known all about it long ago."

"Why, what ought I to do ?" asked the good-humoured Colonel, looking a little embarrassed at this sudden turning of the tables on him.

"Teach her her commandments, of course ; and, above all, the fifth," answered Leveston, with a little amusement at the idea of Meredith engaged in this novel occupation ; "and be sure you point out to her that it's the only com-

mandment with a promise attached to it."

"Very well, I'll do my best," replied the Colonel, "though I know I shall make a preciously bad schoolmaster; I'll come in every day and teach her a little, and I'll begin now, as I've nothing better to do."

So the Colonel set to work at his new occupation; and Cecil at first did very well for him, probably because his manner of teaching her was not a little curious, and, child as she was, she could not help being struck with its originality. However, in process of time they reached the fifth commandment; and here, as he had been ordered, Meredith proceeded to impress upon her mind the promise, and the importance with which such a promise invested the precept. But this it was utterly impossible to make her see. She would persist; she didn't want to live in the land, she wanted to go to England, and would be very glad when she left India.

"That's not what it means at all," answered Meredith, greatly perplexed. "England, or any land, is just the same; you won't live long in it unless you are good. You see the Bible

says so, and it's true: you must honour and obey your parents for that."

"Stupid godpapa!" answered the little missy, pertly. "I know very well that the regiment never stays long in one place; it's going to Poonah soon—I heard you telling Captain Marlin all about it the other day, and I don't intend ever to leave it. I shall go about with it, so I don't want to live long in any place."

"The perverse puss understands as well as I do," thought the Colonel, "but I'll never be able to make her own it. Oh! dear, I wish I had never undertaken to teach her! And now here's Anstruther coming in, and he'll sit and grin in his confounded quiet manner, whenever I make a mistake, or she's impudent. I'd like to order him off, but then he'd be sure to make a story of it, and say I was afraid to teach before him. No; I'll get round the difficulty another way, and not explain any more. Come, now, Cecil, learn this for me."

"I don't like learning it," pouted Cecil. "I don't understand it, and you never explained it to me, so as I could know what it meant."

“ Well,” said Meredith, fairly driven into a corner, “ you wouldn’t understand my explanation, so I won’t go over it again ; but I’ll tell you what I’ll do, if you’ll learn it nicely, and remember it, and, above all, if you’ll act on it—that is, you know, if you’ll promise never to be naughty and disobedient to papa again—I’ll give you some beautiful mangoes after dinner to-day ; you haven’t seen any like them here before. Will you do what I want now ? ”

Cecil paused to reflect a minute. The mangoes were certainly tempting, but then she would have to give up her own way, and that the spoilt little beauty didn’t like the thought of at all ; but before she had time to answer Anstruther called out,

“ Is that the way you teach, Colonel ? Bribery and corruption I call it. Teach the child the right thing must be done because it is right, and not because it will be pleasing or advantageous. That would stand by her in after-life, and make her a credit to the regiment. Your way of training will turn her into a captious, capricious woman, caring for no one’s will or pleasure but

her own, and therefore constantly in scrapes and difficulties."

"You're right, lad," answered the Colonel, rising, and giving himself a kind of impatient shake. "The work's above me, and I should only do mischief. I'll leave her in her father's hands now, and see what he can make of her—she's one too many for me."

So the Colonel resigned his office of preceptor; and Levoston, after a little time, finding firmness and patience must be exerted, made the effort, and partly by exerting his authority, and partly by working on her affections, at last succeeded in obtaining the upper hand. After which Cecil, who inherited all her father's quickness and cleverness, made rapid progress, and in time began to experience an intense and rather malicious pleasure in putting the younger fellows of the regiment through a mild form of competitive examination, whenever they came to pay court to her, as indeed they were very fond of doing.

When Cecil was about nine years old, the—th Dragoons were ordered to Poonah, in the

Bombay Presidency; and they hoped, in about four years more, that, their time of foreign service being out, they should return home. In this hope, however, they were disappointed, for at the end of their time some insurrectionary movements in the North-west Provinces delayed their departure, and it was not until three years more had elapsed that they really found themselves on board the troop-ship *Crocodile*, bound for Portsmouth.

CHAPTER V.

A FAIRY-QUEEN.

DURING all these years, Cecil, now in truth the darling and pride of the regiment, had been not only growing into a graceful girl, but improving in every way, from the spoilt, headstrong child of six or seven last described.

There were only one or two married officers in the regiment. Mrs. Cholmondley, Captain Cholmondléy's wife, was, however, a most charming woman, and had, besides, taken a great fancy to the pretty spoiled child. She kept her a great deal with her, and had, with Leveston's consent, taken a great deal of her education, both mental, moral, and physical, into her own hands.

Cecil, therefore, at the age of sixteen, was perhaps better educated than English girls of that age generally are; perfectly frank and easy in her manners, yet very well up in all social etiquette, which Mrs. Cholmondley had wisely considered would be the best safeguard of a girl in her anomalous position. On the most friendly terms with all her brother officers, as she used laughingly to call them; a daring rider, attending her father in all his hunting expeditions, and as much at home in a wild gallop after a "sunder" of hog as in an idle saunter up and down the parade to hear the band play; A 1 at billiards, a brilliant musician, and, in spite of her bringing up amongst men, and her many manly accomplishments, possessed of the most perfect manners; so merry, yet so gentle, so daring, yet so lady-like, so honourable, so upright, looking at things from a rather man-like point of view, as was to be expected; so entirely free from any tendency to flirting, though not devoid of a spice of coquetry, natural and pleasant in a girl of her beauty. With such a cha-

racter, was it any wonder that every officer in the regiment adored their Queen, as they called her? And had she shown the smallest tendency to favouring any of them, or tried, as some girls would, to play them off one against another, incalculable mischief might have been done.

As it was, her brother officers all saw that she only looked on them in that light, and that nothing was further from her mind than ascribing their attentions to any other motive. So even those who had dared to love her with the love of their lives, the best and deepest they had to offer—and there were several who had done so—did not breathe a word that might awaken her suspicions, and break for ever the bond of good-fellowship that subsisted between them, and which was so sweet, when nothing better or dearer could be obtained.

Leveston was by this time well up among the list of captains—in fact, very near the top. He did not live in barracks now, but generally took lodgings quite close to them, where Cecil managed matters for him, and kept their little

abode the picture of happiness and comfort. Their rooms were always bright with flowers, votive offerings from Cecil's friends; she never thought of them as admirers, and having no female friend, for the Cholmondleys had left, she had no one to put it into her head that they might be such. In fact, it would have been hard to find another girl of her age so completely ignorant of love, or anything relating to it, as this young beauty, brought up in barracks, and surrounded from her childhood with an atmosphere of adulation and devotion very nearly approaching to adoration.

She saw and recognised the fact that she was surrounded by friends, so kind and attentive, so unremitting in their endeavours to please her, so untiring in their worship of her, that they might well be called her slaves. But the true reason of this devotion never dawned on her; she rather ascribed it to the position to which she had been elevated as Queen of the Regiment—a position which entailed on her numberless pleasant duties, such as doing the honours of dances, croquet, archery, and riding-

parties, hostess at picnics, &c., and which entailed on her subjects fêtes of every description, whenever the fancy for any such tribute entered into her bright young head. She really and truly believed in her royal power, and it would never have entered into her mind to conceive it possible that anyone connected with the regiment would dare to oppose her decrees in the smallest matter. She firmly believed herself to be more despotic and absolute than our Sovereign Lady on her throne ; and perhaps, indeed, it was so, any man who had once come under the spell of her influence never dreaming henceforth of the possibility of disobeying her, but yielding himself up blindly to her service, like everyone else.

With her father she was a kind of loving tyrant, ordering him in everything, yet obeying whenever he asked her to do so, which was very seldom, with a playful grace that enhanced the value of the act tenfold.

Except Mrs. Cholmondley, she had no female friends ; and when that lady left, she never felt disposed to fraternize much with Major Brown's

wife, or Captain Tennant's either, and they were the only ladies besides herself in the regiment.

Perhaps these ladies did not care to be intimate with a chit of a girl, as no doubt they called Cecil among themselves; so, though they were on visiting terms, there was no cordiality between them; and I think the girl sometimes even amused herself at their expense. They most undoubtedly would have been well pleased could they have ousted a rival who occupied such an important place in the regiment; but seeing clearly that any such attempt would be useless and impolitic, they pretended to admire her sufficiently to lull suspicion as to their real feelings, and waited patiently till either she or they should, in the course of events, be removed to some other position. But though Cecil did not care for them, nor they for her, she was scrupulously polite to them, and they were always welcomed to her five o'clock tea, which had become an institution in the —th Dragoons, and was, in fact, the Queen's levee, as it was generally called. About that hour all those

who had any spare time, or were not on duty, would congregate in her bright little drawing-room, victimizing themselves often by taking the beverage least in accordance with their tastes, for the sake of receiving it from her small white hands, and catching the smiling glance of her dark velvety eyes as she offered it to them.

It was the regular thing in the regiment, and unless otherwise employed, no one would have dreamed of passing a day without presenting himself at Cecil's tea. A very good institution it was, too, as the colonel often observed. It kept young foolish fellows from wasting time and money in low and vicious haunts; for even those who were not, so to speak, in love with the young pure girl, were yet too much under her influence and too eager for her favour to run the risk of losing it by wild escapades.

The secret of this great power was perhaps that she enjoyed innocent fun as thoroughly as any of them, would laugh at their mad pranks, back the best player at the racket-courts, the boldest rider in a pig-sticking expedition,

listen to their plans for amusement, and join heartily in getting them up, so that while they adored her madly, they yet knew that, with the one exception of their love, the mention of which would break the charm for ever, she was the best confidant of their secrets, the most tender sympathiser in their troubles, the most ready helper in smoothing over any difficulty into which heedlessness and extravagance might have brought them.

It was a standing joke against Marlin in the regiment, that one day, a year or two before, on the occasion of a dance being given in honour of the Queen of the Regiment having attained the age of fourteen years, she, having slipped off quietly to play the part of hostess to some new arrivals, found Marlin sitting alone out in the verandah, and looking very hot and uncomfortable.

“Why, Moses!” she exclaimed (such was his name, and at that time she always called him by it), “what is the matter with you? I saw you were not dancing, and wondered at it—you are always so fond of it.”

“Keep it dark if I tell you, will you?” he asked earnestly; “but the fact is, I’ve got on a pair of the most confoundedly tight boots; and, to make the matter worse, I tried to dance in them. I hadn’t gone far—and I was dancing with a precious heavy woman, too, catch me asking her again—when the pain became so intense, I could have howled loud enough to drown the noise of the band; but I was afraid of the chaffing I should get if it was known, so I merely handed my partner to a seat, and, bowing, said, ‘Pray excuse me, but the fact is I am indisposed, and am convinced if I remain longer in the room I shall fall down in a fit.’ ‘Oh! pray don’t let me keep you,’ said my heavy partner, looking at me in such a frightened manner that I bolted without further parley, for fear of laughing in her face, in spite of my poor feet. What a feeble thing it was to come to a dance in tight boots! Oh! Marlin, my boy, I’m afraid your getting feebler and feebler every day; and now I’ve been and gone and confided in a woman, which is the feeblest of all.”

“Not a woman yet, only a girl, Moses,” answered Cecil, laughing—“a girl, and your Queen too, so don’t be afraid, I won’t betray you. But now, why don’t you run off to your quarters, and get an old pair, and you could be back before any one missed you.”

“Just so,” he replied. “That isn’t half a bad idea, your Majesty; though, unless you had mentioned it, I don’t believe I’d have thought of it—shows you how truly feeble my intellect is becoming.”

“Well, I shall look for you presently,” answered the girl, moving towards her guests, and leaving Marlin to follow her advice, which he did, and she never told of his difficulties; but he, who found it impossible to keep a secret, especially one regarding himself, told everybody the whole incident within the next three days; and everyone, whilst laughing at Marlin, recognized their young Queen’s discretion and sympathetic behaviour.

After that Marlin made her his chosen confidant in all difficulties and scrapes that were of a nature to be confided to the young girl’s ear;

for, to do him justice, madcap as he was, he would as soon have thought of cutting off his right hand as sully the purity of her mind by allowing her even a glimpse of any of the darker pages of his life.

And she had such a clear head, and her counsels were so judicious, that soon others sought her advice also, so that before she was, one might say, quite out of her childhood, being hardly fifteen, she had become accustomed to think and care for other people's distresses and annoyances far more than for her own. Not that at that time she ever did meet with anything to trouble her; on the contrary, her life was one long bright fête, but the habit of constant thought for others was acquired, and was the origin of that self-forgetfulness of disposition that afterwards formed such a prominent feature in her character.

Young fellows who a few months before would have ridiculed the idea of reposing any confidence in a woman, might have been seen, a few weeks after joining the regiment, hurrying off to Captain Leveston's house of an afternoon,

trying to get there a quarter of an hour or so before the general levee, so as to have a few minutes' tête-à-tête with their young hostess before the rest of the world appeared. Or perhaps at a ball an observer might have guessed important revelations were being made, as they promenaded round the room after a dance, with anxious eyes seeking their young partner's grave, intent face, as she listened, and turned over in her mind the fact laid before her.

"Our Queen always has her wits about her," a young cornet was overheard saying one day, when Cecil was not much more than fifteen years of age. "She can always tell you how to do the right thing at the right time, and her view of the case is always the most upright and honourable one that can be taken."

"You think so now," laughed Meredith, now a jolly, bluff, middle-aged man. "It isn't so very long since you called us all a set of muffs for having such a high opinion of any girl, and foretold that, unless some bold spirits like yourself set themselves against it, the regiment would go to the dogs before long."

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"I was a fool, and didn't know what I was talking of then," answered the young fellow, colouring to the roots of his hair. "But, after all, you'll allow it was not unnatural I should think so, as no other woman ever was or ever will be like our Queen."

"Bravo, youngster! well spoken. Stick to that, and you will be a credit to 'ours' yet," replied Meredith, at the same time rising to go and see his friend Leveston, he said, but more probably for the sake of a little quiet chat with the young lady they had just been discussing.

CHAPTER VI.

JUST IN TIME.

WHEN Cecil was almost sixteen, and a few months before they set sail for England, a grand excursion for hunting purposes was got up by Marlin, Anstruther, Leveston, and one or two more. They were going a few days' journey more towards the interior, so as to get into wilder and less populous country, where they might have a greater certainty of finding game than in the immediate neighbourhood of Poonah. Hog-hunting, or pig-sticking, as it is now more usually called, was the chief object of their expedition; and Cecil, who, with her own tent and train of attendants, always accompanied her father wherever he went, was to go

with them. It was an arrangement that the hunters never objected to. In a gallop after hog, though she took no part in the actual slaughter, she was as much at home as the best rider among them; and her beautiful chestnut, half English, half Arab, was, with her light weight, so much the fleetest animal in the regiment, that, had she chosen, she might, on almost every occasion, have claimed first spear, no matter how long or how difficult the run.

Then it was so pleasant to be able to talk over their daring deeds with her afterwards, to hear her smiling words of praise, and listen to her musical laugh as she good-naturedly chaffed an awkward or unfortunate hunter. They accomplished their journey comfortably, and at the end of the third day arrived at the spot chosen for their temporary encampment. Here it was determined that they should remain during five or six days, at the end of which time they would return to Poonah, where they fondly hoped to be able to give a glowing account of their sport.

Leveston, a melancholy and rather silent

man, except when in conversation with his child or a few intimate friends, was still passionately fond of hunting; it was only when engaged in one of these expeditions that he brightened up, and seemed for a few hours to become again the gay light-hearted man he had been before his terrible bereavement. Everything that pleased him pleased Cecil, who absolutely doted on her father; therefore she was always even more brilliant and sparkling at these times than at any others, and formed the life and soul of the party.

By nine o'clock next morning the camp was all astir; the shikaris had reported a "sounder" of hog in a grove about a mile distant. The beaters were ready, the breakfast had been discussed, and horses were being led up and down before the tents. Conspicuous amongst them was Tornado, Cecil's bright chestnut, with her saddle and accoutrements, looking as if they had seen not a little hard service.

A minute or two more, and the hunters came trooping forth, armed with their bright tipped boarspears, and all in the highest state of bustle

and excitement. Cecil came out with her father, and sprung from his hand lightly into her saddle. The fiery chestnut, released by the syce, bounded into the air, tossing its delicate head, and rolling its restless wild eye with impatience as it surveyed the busy scene, the meaning of which it understood as well as its rider.

Cecil carried a light boar-spear in her hand; not that she was ever in the habit of using it—she did not care to draw blood herself, and only joined the hunt for the sake of the wild excitement of the ride, which was to her the greatest pleasure of life, and also because her father never half enjoyed himself when she was not riding by his side; but it was considered a prudent precaution that she should have the means of defending herself, if the necessity occurred, and it gave a finish to her equipment that Cecil was not unconscious of.

All were mounted at last; Leveston on a large bay, well known throughout all the Presidency as one of the steadiest and best trained hunters out. The Giant's fame was a great source of pride to Cecil, for she liked to hear

her father and his horse mentioned as the best and boldest pair going, whenever hog-hunting became the topic of conversation.

Marlin joined the hunt, more for the fun of looking on and being with a pleasant set of fellows, leading a gay jovial life, than from any interest in the sport. Years in a dragoon regiment had indeed made him rather more of a horseman than when he complained he could never sit on the outside of a horse, except in his regulation saddle; but still he was no rider, and unless a hog came suddenly in his way, never achieved any distinction in the hunting-field. His nag was therefore of the steadiest and safest description; it thoroughly understood its business, could keep on for ever at a pace very much resembling a snail's gallop, was more noteworthy for surefootedness than good looks, and rejoiced in the name of Piggy.

Anstruther that day had brought out a successor to old Shaitan, who, though he seemed to possess the Arab quality of living for ever, was yet too unsafe to be trusted in the headlong gallop of a pig-hunt. The new mount was

a dashing grey, rather large for a pure Arab, though he was said to be such; a perfect picture he was, with such a wild head and restless, nervous ears.

"You won't do much to-day, I think, Anstruther," said Leveston, looking at "Daybreak"—such was the animal's name. "He doesn't seem to me half trained enough, and very hot in his temper; take care you don't get a bad fall."

"Oh! he'll do well enough," replied Anstruther, who, by the way, had got his troop a few days before. "I daresay I shan't distinguish myself to-day, but he'll understand his business before long."

After a ride of about a mile, they reached the grove where the hogs were said to be. The hunters drew up on one side, the beaters went in, and entering from the opposite point, laid their plans for driving the pigs out near where the hunters were waiting. After a short time spent in breathless silence, a crashing sound was heard; nearer it came, and nearer. Presently the underwood was torn asunder, and

ten wild pigs, headed by an enormous grey boar, burst from cover, and took towards a large tope, seen on the outskirts of the plain, about five miles distant.

"Steady a minute, gentlemen—steady!" cried Leveston. "Let them get well out of cover, or they may turn back. Now they are safe—on with you!" and loosening his hand on the Giant's curb, away he flew, like an arrow from a bow, Cecil and Tornado sticking close to him, whilst the others followed, according to the speed of their horses, Marlin on Piggy bringing up the rear.

A few minutes' reckless galloping over the dry, stony ground brought them up with the hogs. Leveston and Anstruther singled out the old grey boar, who, separated from the drove, continued his course gallantly for the far-distant palm tope, at a pace that spoke highly of his racing capabilities, and proved that, if his bottom equalled his speed, he might even succeed in reaching the cover before the hunters came up with him.

Cecil, of course, followed her father, keeping,

perhaps, the least thing behind him, so as not to interfere in his motions, in the event of the boar suddenly turning—an event very likely to take place, if he found himself hard pressed. The others each singled out their prey, and pursued the hunt in different directions. Marlin was singularly fortunate, for an old sow, hotly pursued by Marchmont and Tennant, both bold and daring riders, doubled back towards the grove from which she had started, and in a direction that enabled even Piggy to come up with her by taking a diagonal line. She was so hotly pressed by the two others, and so intent on the cover before her, that Marlin, galloping in a slanting direction in front of her pursuers, succeeded in giving her an oblique scratch just above the tail. It was but a scratch, however; a few drops of blood followed, thus enabling him to claim first spear, and that taken, too, from two of the best riders in the regiment.

In the meantime, Leveston, Cecil, and Anstruther sped over the plain at the best speed their horses could muster. Suddenly, right in

their path there yawned a deep fissure, or crack, across the plain. It was about eighteen feet wide. Could the boar take it? and if he did, could they follow? No; he must turn to right or left, and then they had him, that was certain. They looked at each other in self-congratulation, mingled with a manly emulation, each a little anxious to snatch the prize from the other, and prove himself the best man in this exciting chase. But just as they were about to take a pull on their horses, the boar laid himself out like a good one, and, rising like a bird, cleared the chasm.

"Let me give you a lead, papa," cried Cecil at this moment, and letting out Tornado to racing speed, though still holding him well together, she flew past them, and almost before they could think or see, landed on the other side of the yawning abyss.

The Giant, fired by the example of his stable friend, went at it in splendid style; and even the untrained Arab, Daybreak, ridden by such a horseman as Anstruther, had no choice but to face the object. Steadying him at it was im-

possible, however ; his temper was up, and no hands could have prevented him rushing. He went at it like a mad thing, his legs straggling in every direction, rose with a convulsive spring into the air, that if he had been well together, would have carried him over yards more ground than was necessary, and landed on the other sid , letting one of his hind legs slip over the edge, and only recovering himself by a violent struggle.

However, in another minute he was all right again, and laying himself down, soon overtook his companions ; but the struggle and the fright had told on him, and though his Arab blood still carried him on gamely, Anstruther felt his limbs quiver once or twice, and knew also that his temper had become so excited and unruly, that it was extremely improbable he would give his master a chance of making a spear that day.

By this time they had gone over between three and four miles of ground, and were nearing a rocky barren tract of country that lay between them and the wild boar's goal. That animal was beginning to show symptoms of dis-

tress, and suddenly reaching a low mass of boulders, faced round on them, and stood at bay. Leveston was first, and as he rode up the boar, darting forward, charged him, with the intent of ripping the horse.

The Giant was, however, too old a soldier in these encounters to allow of this; he wheeled nimbly aside. Leveston struck, but missed his mark, and the grey Arab came thundering up after him, too headstrong and untrained to turn or slacken speed. The hog rushed between his legs, and shot him forward full length on the plain, his rider falling with him and partly underneath him, without power to move or defend himself in any way.

The Giant, when swerving from his foe's attack, had cantered a short way out on to the plain, so that when the boar, seeing the fall of his enemies, turned like a flash on their prostrate forms, Leveston was too far off to render immediate assistance.

Not so Cecil, however; she had been holding a few paces back, not to inconvenience the hunters, and now came up, with her well-trained

horse in perfect command. A glance showed her how matters stood. The boar had already reached Anstruther's motionless form, another moment and its gleaming tusks would have given the death-stroke to her friend. She was already beside them, going at an easy gallop, and guided by a sudden impulse to save her comrade at any risk, she leaned forward, and thrust her bright spear, with all the force of her little arm, into the animal, just behind the shoulder.

With a yell the hog sprang forward, and fell dead across Anstruther, and his still prostrate struggling horse, whilst she galloped onwards quickly, to avoid the charge she expected, never dreaming her thrust had been so strong and deadly.

As she passed on, her father came up like a whirlwind, but stopped short with a suddenness that brought the old Giant on his haunches, as he saw the group before him. Then springing from his horse, he caught the half-mad Arab, that, wild with fright and the pain of its fall, had only just recovered its feet as

he seized the bridle, and, had he not been so quick, would no doubt have made off, dragging Anstruther's senseless form after it, entangled as he was in the saddle.

As he released the stunned man from the entanglement of his accoutrements, and laid him on the ground, Cecil rode up.

"Just in time you were, darling," said her father, smiling approvingly; "a minute more, and our poor friend would have been done for. A better spear was never made, and it was your first too. This young fellow owes you his life."

"Oh! papa, don't say so!" implored Cecil, "he will think himself bound to be grateful, and I shouldn't like him to feel that, it would destroy all our pleasant, careless friendship."

"Well, I won't say it if you don't like; only he'll feel just the same, I'm sure, when he knows all about the adventure. Here, hold these horses," he added, "whilst I give him something to revive him."

Cecil sprang lightly to the ground as her father spoke, and knotting the reins together,

left the three horses to themselves, whilst she moved towards her father, ready to help in case he required her aid.

"Here," he said, looking up as she approached, "hold up his head for a minute, whilst I try and get some of this brandy and water down his throat. So—I think I can manage it; yes, he has swallowed some, and begins to recover a little."

When 'Anstruther opened his eyes, and found his head supported on Cecil's knee, whilst her father, bending over him with his pocket-pistol in his hand, seemed about to administer another dose of the cordial, he blushed deeply, and endeavoured to rise, but was too weak, and fell back again with a heavy sigh.

"It's no good," he muttered, "I'm hurt somewhere here;" and he pressed his hand to his side. "How did it all happen?"

"That brute I warned you against let the boar charge between his legs, and came down an awful crumpler," answered Leveston. "However, the thing now is how to get you back to camp; you can't ride, I'm sure."

"I don't think I can," he replied faintly, growing deathly pale with the effort.

"Well, never mind, don't talk," said Leveston: "take a little more of this, and Cecil will ride for assistance, whilst I stay by you."

This arrangement seemed indeed the best under the circumstances, and Cecil, mounting, rode off at the best speed the gallant chestnut could boast.

In due time help arrived. Anstruther was brought into camp, and it being evident he had been injured internally by the fall, it was decided that he should return to Poonah for medical advice, accompanied by Marlin, Leveston, and Cecil, whilst the others remained behind for a few more days' sport.

The journey to Poonah was tedious enough; every movement being attended with pain to the sufferer; and it was then that Cecil's tender sympathetic nature showed to the greatest advantage as she rode by his litter, beguiling his pain with merry words and gay stories, concocting cooling drinks and strengthening tempting dishes when they halted for refreshment,

watching the coolies, lest by careless movement they might torture his aching body, caring for him in every tender womanly way, as a beloved sister might care for and soothe a suffering brother.

Poonah was reached at last, and there the surgeon, to their great relief, assured them that, though he had five or six ribs broken, yet nothing of vital importance was touched, and he could promise that in a short time he would be as well as ever again.

In the meantime he was an invalid, confined to his bed, and the unwonted solitude thus enforced on him gave him time for reflection.

He had felt greatly moved on hearing what Cecil had done and dared to save his life. It is true she would have done it for any other human soul in danger of death, but that did not make the thought less sweet and wonderful to him, that his life washers; she had won it for him out of great peril, and should she ever need it, even to the death, it belonged to her, and he had no right to withhold it from her.

And, strange to say, this thought had no bitterness in it, though it embodied the essence of slavery; and though such a sense of obligation to another would have revolted his soul, thought of in connection with her, it made him strangely happy.

"She is so good, so winning," he thought "who would not be pleased to owe his life, his health, his strength, yes, even the very air he breathes, to her? I have known her since she was a child, and can value her worth better than most; and yet even those who know her least, think as I do.—And yet," he added to himself, with a glow of happy triumph, "let them adore her as they will, they have none of them the wild pleasure of belonging to her as I do; of having their life in her hands, to demand it, or bestow it again on its owner, as is my case; and they never will, such a chance occurs but once in a life-time."

Poor young man! He loved her dearly and truly, as a lover loves his betrothed, as a bridegroom his bride, and yet he knew it

not; no one thought of love like that, in connection with the Queen of the Regiment; it was enough that she was their queen to justify any amount of idolatry, but none dared to dream of greater bliss than silent worship.

So he thought his ardent passionate gratitude was but a loyal homage to his queen for having saved his life with her own gracious hand, and looked daily for the bouquet of flowers she never forgot to send him by her father, along with books and dainties, to please both his mind and palate, with an intensity of pleasure that would have all vanished, had he been tormented by a lover's hopes and fears.

As to Cecil, her feelings about this adventure were very contradictory. She knew all her friends praised and admired her for her rare presence of mind, skill, and promptitude, which, in this instance, had undeniably been the means of saving a fellow-creature's life. But whilst she knew this, and felt its influence in her intercourse with those around her, day by day, not the less clearly did she recognize the fact that it was the success of her effort that

constituted its merit in the eyes of all about her. If her hand had trembled, or her skill been less, and danger had therefrom resulted to him or her, how she would have been blamed ! Even her warmest allies would, she knew, have called her courage rashness, her attempt folly ; while the few enemies she possessed, namely, Mesdames Brown, Tennant, and some other punctilious ladies about, who often professed themselves shocked at her wildness, would have cried out in chorus, " How fast !"—" How unwomanly !"

Then, again, besides this view of the matter, the thought often presented itself to her mind, " What did Anstruther think of it ?" She felt gladly and proudly that he owed his life to her ; but did he acknowledge the full value of her daring feat ? And if he did, was it sweet or bitter to him to think that he, in the full vigour and pride of manhood, owed his escape from a hunting adventure to the feeble strength of a young girl ?

She turned this over in her mind often and often, longing to know his real feelings on the

subject; wondering whether, when he was better and again appeared in public, their friendship would resume its old pleasant footing, or whether the binding sense of obligation would cause him to shun her presence, and fetter their ancient merry intercourse. This question she could not solve, though it was ever present to her; but one thing she did know very surely, and it was, that this act she had performed, call it right or wrong as people might, whatever its consequences were, held one great good for her: her hand had rescued her friend from danger at the peril of her own life; she had stood between him and death.

She thought a great deal more of it than any wise duenna would have deemed safe, but she told no one her feelings, and was quite unconscious what signification they bore, while day by day, as she received his messages of thanks for her flowers, and heard of his progress towards recovery, she murmured, with a keen sensation of delight, "I am glad it was none but I. My old kind friend Gerald, I am glad that I have been able at last to do something for you."

CHAPTER VII.


A NEW-COMER.

WHILST Leveston, Cecil, and the rest were absent on this expedition, the regiment had been joined by a new-comer, a most unmitigated Griffin, but withal not a bad young fellow, when he had shaken into his proper place. Hedworth Villars was a slight, fair young fellow, about the middle height, with blue eyes, and that coloured moustache the idea of which is conveyed by the epithet ginger, by which sobriquet he was afterwards known in the regiment. Add to these attractions beautiful hands and feet, of which he was inordinately proud, taking the most extravagant precautions to preserve the whiteness of the one


and exhibit the symmetry of the other ; above all, the possessor of a long rent-roll, though still a mere boy. Imagining all these many and varied excellent qualities, you will not be surprised to hear that young Villars thought not a little of himself, and was inclined to imagine himself somewhat harassed and persecuted by the anxious attentions of mammas and their marriageable daughters.

However, as said before, notwithstanding personal vanity, he was not a bad young fellow ; and it was afterwards found that, whenever anything occurred to rouse him from the contemplation of his white, ring-bedecked hands, he could show as much cool courage and daring as the most rough-and-ready among his comrades.

Unfortunately for him, at his first start in the regiment he fell into the hands of Mesdames Brown and Tennant. These two ladies, without being in any way bad or vindictive women, were yet, perhaps not unnaturally, intensely jealous of Cecil's position and power. They would not have said what was untrue on purpose to injure



her, even had they been sure of gaining credence—that would have seemed to them wicked; but they saw no harm in repeating her gay, girlish pranks in the most unfavourable sense, turning up their eyes whilst speaking, and hoping they might be mistaken, in a manner that conveyed to the listener's mind that they knew more than they said. Understand well, too, that they were far too clever and cautious to speak in this way before any who knew the Queen of the Regiment—that would have betrayed their mischievous designs, and brought them into disrepute. It was rarely that such a favourable opportunity occurred of prejudicing a new-comer as the present; and the two aggrieved ladies accordingly determined they would leave no stone unturned to make him wholly their own. They had seen him out once or twice before he came to call, and had arranged between themselves how to prevent that “nice young man” being drawn into Cecil's clique, as they called it, and falling into the absurd habit of devotion to her which destroyed his brother officers.



Accordingly, when young Villars called on Mrs. Brown, about two days after his arrival, he found her very entertaining, and evidently pleased with his company. She was a pretty, well-preserved woman, always perfectly dressed, and with an appealing manner that seemed to place her companion in mental superiority over her at once, in a way particularly pleasant to a young fellow profoundly ignorant of the world in general, and the Indian world in particular.

"You haven't met Miss Leveston yet?" she asked after a time. "Oh! no—I remember, she's away with her father; but I suppose you've heard her spoken of? They call her the Queen of the Regiment, as perhaps you know."

"Yes, I have heard of her," he answered, "but not much; every one I ask about her says, 'Wait and see; you shall judge for yourself.' Now I like to hear a little about people beforehand. Perhaps you would describe her to me."

"Oh! willingly," she replied; "but I fear if you have formed any very brilliant idea of her you will be rather disappointed. She is a little bit of a girl, not very pretty, though quite nice—

looking enough to pass muster as being very pretty here, and with very schoolboyish manners; rides like a rough rider, dances till she half kills her partners, does everything, in fact, fast and forward; and last, not least, holds a levee of young men in her father's lodgings every afternoon. The officers of 'ours' here now have been so long in this country that they have forgotten what a well-bred English girl should be like; but you, who have only just come out, must of course be accustomed to a much more refined style, and will be proportionately disappointed if you expect anything better. After all, it is not quite so much her fault, poor girl, as you may at first think, as she has been brought up entirely amongst men, and only knows their ways."

"I suppose that is a disadvantage," he answered, trying to reconcile Mrs. Brown's picture with the few glowing words he had heard others speak of this young girl. But after musing a minute, whilst the lady watched rather anxiously to see the effect of her words, he went on, "All the fellows here seem per-

fectly to adore her. How is that? For they are gentlemen themselves, and must, in spite of long absence from England, know at least a little of what a lady should be."

"Very true," she answered; "but they may be blinded. I didn't wish to speak against the girl, as, if it were known, all your comrades are so infatuated about her, it might make my position disagreeable. You, however, I think I can trust, so I don't mind telling you—she is the most outrageous flirt, and you know when a girl is that, in a place like this, where she has no rivals, she may do what she likes with every man she meets, and so she does. I believe every one that joins goes through all the phases of a most frantic love for her, ending by finding she has been playing with him the whole time, and that he has made a fool of himself."

In this manner Mrs. Brown rambled on for some time longer, so that when Villars left her quarters, and went to call on Mrs. Tennant, his longing to see the Queen of the Regiment had greatly decreased, and confirmation of Mrs.

Brown's words being skilfully dropped in here and there by the other lady, he departed to his own quarters with a very well-developed prejudice against the Queen, and an intense feeling of astonishment at the folly of his brother-officers in allowing themselves to be so blinded. At any rate, he was determined to resist this girl's wiles, and show that at least one man in the regiment had strength of mind enough to withstand the artifices of a thorough-paced coquette, who counted her conquests by the hundred, and amused herself by playing with the best feelings of true manly hearts. Therefore the young fellow was not particularly anxious to make her acquaintance, having an uneasy conviction that though, according to the old proverb, "Forewarned is fore-armed," and though he was quite determined to defy the wiles of the enchantress, yet it was not at all impossible, or even very unlikely, that he might fail, as others had done before him.

The news of Cecil's return, a few days sooner than had been expected, soon spread through the cantonment, together with the full particu-

lars of Anstruther's accident. Nothing was talked of but the Queen's bravery and devotion, her skill and presence of mind; and as soon as the doctor's opinion that the injuries were not serious, and Anstruther might see a few friends, became known, the greatest eagerness prevailed to call on him, and hear what he had to say on the matter.

"Well, youngster," said Paget (now a major, and still with the old corps), entering the mess-room on his return from paying a visit to Anstruther the day after he came back, "will you come with me, and be presented to our Queen this afternoon?"

"I don't seem to care about it," answered Villars. "I'm not a good hand at talking small talk to ladies, and flirting is too great an exertion this hot weather, unless she'd do it all for one. Do you think she would?"

The young fellow looked up lazily, yet mischievously, under his eyelashes as he said this; he had a pretty good idea it would nettle the Major, and make him refuse to introduce him, which was the reason of his saying it.

"I only hope you'll venture to suggest the idea of a flirtation to her," said the Major, with a contemptuous laugh. "You wouldn't do it twice, I can tell you."

"Why, she must be a perfect tigress, at that rate," drawled Villars, with his most foppish air. "What will she do to poor little me? I'm quite afraid of her. And I'm so comfortable here, I don't want to move."

"Confounded donkey!" muttered Paget to himself, but not so low as to prevent Villars hearing it, who chuckled with pleasure at the rise he was taking out of the Major. After a pause, however, the latter went on, "You'll not get on among us unless you conform to our ways, and it's our custom to introduce newcomers to the Queen, so you'd better come and get it over at once. I'll say no more now."

And still looking highly disconcerted, Paget prepared to leave the room.

"Hulloa! Major, stop a bit, can't you?" Villars shouted after him. "You take a fellow up in such a hurry, he has no time to think of a thing. *Che sarà sarà*, as the Italians say; so if

I must do it, I may as well go with you as any one else."

"Her name isn't Sara—it's Cecil," answered the Major. "Though I should advise you not to speak of her in such a familiar manner; it won't be liked."

"The old booby!" thought Villars, whilst he roared with laughter at the application of his quotation.

"I beg your pardon," he went on, seeing the Major look very much annoyed; "I didn't intend any offence to your divinity, so you'll forgive me."

"Where no offence is intended none should be taken," replied Paget, sententiously. "But a young fellow like you doesn't perhaps understand that it is better to choose some other subject for your jests than a young lady's name. Remember that, however, and you will find it of service to you through life. And now I'm off. Come to my quarters at half-past four, and then we go on to Leveston's."

The same afternoon, at about five o'clock, Villars and Paget entered Cecil's drawing-room

together. There were a good many people there already—amongst others Mrs. Tennant, a fact which astonished Villars a little, as he had hardly thought, from her manner of speaking, that she honoured her fair rival by her countenance in any way. He followed Paget slowly to the other end of the room, where he saw standing amongst a group of gentlemen a young girl, who he instinctively guessed must be the Queen.

He was not mistaken, for Paget, after a few indifferent remarks, turned towards him, saying,

“And now, your Majesty, I have brought a new addition to ‘ours,’ to make your acquaintance, and swear allegiance to his Sovereign.”

Villars bowed low at this introduction, for, prejudiced as he was, there was something so dignified, so regal, about this girl, that for a moment the little comic scene became real, and he felt almost as much respect and loyalty as though in the presence of a real monarch. As he bowed he raised his eyes, and met a pair of very lovely velvety ones looking merrily at him,

whilst a small hand was held out frankly to him, a very sweet voice saying at the same time, archly,

“Don’t think me too stupid for allowing all this; but it pleases all my friends to imagine me a very queenly personage, and what pleases them pleases me. Besides, the delusion is not unpleasant.”

“It is no delusion at all,” uttered the foolish youth, rashly, beguiled by the first glance of those bewitching eyes. “You are queen of the widest-spread dominion under the sun, and wield the most potent sceptre of them all. Your empire is in the hearts of men, and your smile the sceptre that claims allegiance from all beholders.”

With a merry ringing laugh she interrupted him—

“Oh! pray, Mr. Villars, don’t say those pretty things of me, all my brother officers will laugh at me, and you surely wouldn’t like to turn me into ridicule.”

The men standing about smiled at the lad’s abashed face; the words had escaped from him

unawares, and now he felt not only foolish, but enraged, to think that at the first outset he should have committed himself to her worship by such a foolish speech as that. He turned away rather sulkily, and began talking to one or two other young cornets, who, though much about his own age, had yet been longer out with the regiment, and consequently delighted in showing what old hands they were.

Paget looked at him as quizzically as his stolid face could look, when the young fellow moved away. His thought was, "You are as much smitten as the rest of us, after all, and that, too, at first sight." However, he didn't think long about it, but turned to converse with the young girl beside him. She, though giving him all the outward show of attention he could desire, was watching a group at the other end of the room, where Villars, surrounded by one or two wild young fellows, was getting rather bewildered at the curious Indian customs that were being revealed to him.

Cecil knew well they were cramming the griffin, but his unpremeditated burst of admira-

tion had interested her a little in him, and whilst laughing at the wonderful stories he was receiving with eager ears, she determined to take him under her protection and stop their chaff.

"Don't mind what they tell you, Mr. Villars," she called out, "they are only playing off their stupid old jokes, that can deceive nobody, on you, because they think you are a griffin. But I am sure you are a great deal sharper than they give you credit for, and I'll forbid them to chaff you, on pain of my severest displeasure."

Villars, however, annoyed at the mess he had made of his plans altogether, and nettled at the little air of patronage with which she spoke, answered stiffly,

"Thanks, very much. I think, however, I can take care of myself, and will not trouble you to interfere."

She raised her pretty eyes in astonishment at perhaps the first uncivil word any of her brother officers had ever addressed to her, turning at the same time with a half amused, half inquiring look, to Paget who still stood beside her.

He frowned darkly on the young man, and, looking at her, shrugged his shoulders, muttering, "Abominable puppy!" whilst Mrs. Tennant, who was seated near Villars, smiled on him sweetly, and murmured so that he alone should hear:

"Quite right—don't let her protect you; you will take care of yourself much better than she can do it for you."

He didn't feel quite satisfied with himself, however; and though he sat down by Mrs. Tennant, and that lady petted and made much of him, to his heart's content, he couldn't help casting regretful glances, now and then, at the bright radiant face that every eye followed with such intense rapture, and that, when by chance turned towards him, seemed to smile just as kindly as though no rude words had ever been uttered by him. As he shook hands with her on leaving, she said,

"I am afraid you did not amuse yourself much to-day, but come as often as you can, and we will soon get to know each other better."

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. TENNANT MAKES A DISCOVERY.

AS Villars walked away that day from Captain Leveston's house, his thoughts were in a state of complete confusion. He had seen their queen, and conversed with her, and had even dared, almost in one breath, to speak flattering and rude words to her; yet he felt no pleasure in thinking either of one or the other, for he recognised from this girl's manner and look that, had he desired her favour, flattery was not the road to it; indeed, he doubted if she thought any praise flattery. She had been too much accustomed to that style of thing from her childhood to look on it in any other light than as the simple truth, which now and

then would reveal itself, let her friends strive to conceal it as they might ; therefore, she paid little attention to such tributes to her beauty, and if persisted in, would probably weary of them, and set down the utterer of them as stupid and ill-bred.

With regard to his rudeness, he thought of it with even less satisfaction than the other thing, which was at least involuntary ; and the fact that Mrs. Tennant had admired him for it, did not tend to raise either her or himself in his estimation. For he had made at least one discovery, which was, that the before-mentioned lady had deceived him in one particular—that of Cecil's beauty. No, now he came to think of it, not in one particular only, but in several. She had described the queen as ill-bred and unlady-like, which she most certainly was not ; she had taken his rudeness so quietly, and had seemed to pass over and forget it so naturally, as if it was some infirmity in which she had no part, and which had in no way offended or annoyed her.

Her sweet, pleasant smile, as she bade him

good-bye, and excused the stupidity of their first meeting, hoping they soon would be better acquainted, haunted him, and he resolved, at least for once, to see and judge for himself before endorsing Mrs. Tennant's unfavourable opinion of the Queen of the Regiment.

"It isn't as if I was a young spoony fellow," he mused, "who thought every female face divine, and was perpetually in love with some one or other—no, that is not my style, thank heaven! Hedworth Villars is well able to take care of himself, and, I flatter myself, is as good a judge of the correct thing, in all matters of female beauty or manners, as any of his age in the three kingdoms."

Which might be true before now, though many of his brother officers would no doubt have thought him green enough; but he quite forgot that, when a man falls in love, his powers of judging coolly and keenly depart, and that, taking all things into consideration, it is always safer not to play with edged tools. He didn't think of that, however, not having yet quite made up his mind whether the tools were

edged or not ; and in a case like this he soon found, to his cost, one may be wounded before the edge has been discovered.

When all her guests had departed, the Queen of the Regiment stood for a few minutes, smiling absently, yet pleasantly, at some merry thought that passed through her mind ; then, as she leant against one of the windows that overlooked the compound, watching all her humble servants wending their way homewards, her glance fell on young Villars, and again a smile passed over her face.

“ Poor young man ! ” she thought—“ he has fallen into Mrs. Tennant’s clutches, and pretty hard he will find it to make his escape. He looked so dreadfully bored, too ! How rude he was to me that time ! Perhaps it was my fault, and I shouldn’t have interfered—at least, until he knew me better. That’s the worst of it, our fellows spoil me, so I don’t really know when I’m doing wrong or not—they’re always delighted with whatever I do.”

“ Papa dear,” she continued, going up to her father, who was reading the newspaper in his

easy-chair, "what's this young fellow Villars like? I never saw him before to-day."

"Like?" answered her father, stretching himself lazily, "well, I think him rather a conceited young fellow. He is wrapped up in his hands and feet, I hear. Wears two pair of gloves wherever he goes out, for fear of their getting tanned."

"His hands, you mean, I suppose, papa—surely not his feet," replied Cecil, with a comical look; "or can he possibly achieve the putting on of two pairs of boots?"

"Silly puss!" he laughed, "you know what I mean; that's the story they tell of him in the regiment. I daresay it's all nonsense, as I never looked."

"Ah! I shouldn't wonder if it was true," she answered; "at any rate, I mean to find out. I'll get 'ours' to give a picnic on a grand scale before we leave, and I'll watch him taking off his gloves for dinner. See if I don't play him a trick. I'll make him cut up cucumbers for salad, or do something useful, in a way that shall necessitate his exposing those precious

members. Won't he be angry with me; and I don't think he likes me already. He'll have to like me, though," she added with a toss of her head; "as I shall tease him until he likes me as well as the rest."

Accordingly Cecil resolved next day to moot the project of a large farewell picnic, when all Poonah and its environs should be invited to share for the last time the hospitalities of the —th Dragoons. She turned the matter over in her head all night, but could not quite settle the day, until she had first consulted Marlin, Paget, and one or two others of her oldest friends.

Next day, therefore, she was much delighted when Marlin made his appearance, at least half an hour earlier than the usual time for presenting himself at her tea. That betokened, as Cecil well knew, some important confidences to make; and, besides, suited her splendidly, as she hoped, when his business was over, there would still be a little time to spare, in which she might broach hers.

"Why!" she cried, as he entered the room,

"you are the very man I have been wishing to see. How very fortunate! Come, sit down and tell me what I can do for you, as I see by your face you have something to say."

"Indeed I have," he answered. "I want to ask your opinion about something. Not that I shall take your advice," he added hastily, "so don't give it; my mind is made up on the course I am about to pursue, but I'd like to hear your remarks, and if you could manage to pitch into me pretty roundly, at the same time, I think I'd feel a little better."

She laughed as she answered—

"I'll do my best, though I don't think that's my line; but tell me, what is the matter, for you seem so grave, you quite alarm me."

"I look grave, because I feel awfully cut up," he replied; "but I daresay you won't mind my news so much—one's best friends feel so little for what does not affect themselves. However, to make an end of it at once. I'm going to cut the whole concern. I've sent in my papers to Meredith, and the next thing you will see in the Gazette will be that Captain Marlin, of the —th

Dragoons, has been permitted to retire from the service, by the sale of his commission."

"Oh! Moses!" cried the girl in consternation; "please don't say so; you surely can't mean it? Why! the regiment would not be the same when once you were gone. We should miss your queer stories and quaint droll expressions; your good-nature and kindness to every one in want of help. Don't leave us—please don't leave us!"

It was a feature of this girl's beauty that she always looked intensely in earnest over anything she tried to do. Now, as she pleaded with Captain Marlin, and told him how he would be missed, she looked so plaintive and beseeching that for a moment the thought flashed through his head: "If she looked like that because she really cared for me, I would let everything else go to the dogs, and live only for her; she might make anything of me she chose, but I know it's only her way; she doesn't even imagine she is tempting me, almost beyond my strength. However, I will keep up to the end, now that is so near, and she shall never know

how sorely she tried me." Then with a more madcap smile than was even usual to him, and in a wilder strain than ever, he went on,

"Sorry I can't oblige your Majesty in this respect; I would indeed if I could, but, first and foremost, you know, perhaps, I've been going pretty hard lately, rattling through a good deal of money, in fact. But very likely you mayn't know that I haven't very much to spend, if I really kept within my income. That's a thing I've long given up trying to do. I'm expecting to meet a great heiress some day, who'll be willing to take the style and title of Mrs. M— upon her; until then I stave off the Jews as well as I can, but in the meantime even their patience is beginning to wear out, and I find I must sell. That will give me enough ready cash to stop the clamorous tongues of the most impatient of my Israelitish constituents—*en attendant* the death of an old relative of mine, who's keeping me out of a very nice property a most unconscionably long time. Don't I just wish she'd go to glory without any further delay! She'd go the other way, though, I know, when she set about it. The

fact is, she's as cunning as a fox, and the stiffest old soldier going. I've tried in various ways to cozen her out of her life interest in that property, but she's too clever by half, and always finds me out."

"How can you talk so?" cried Cecil, half indignant, half amused; "you are worse than ever to-day, and no one hearing you would believe you had one spark of good in you. And now let us see if nothing can be done to help you out of this scrape, and keep you still with us. I feel as if when you go, and our old circle begins to break up, the rest will go too; and I should be so lonely without you all."

"No fear of the others going; and it is for them you care, not for me," answered Marlin bitterly.

"Oh! don't say so—you know you don't believe it," pleaded the young girl earnestly; "you know how fond I was of you always, ever since I can remember. You and Anstruther have always been my greatest friends, and it hurts me to hear you say such things. You won't again, will you?" she continued, laying

her hand on his arm in the warmth of her feelings.

Just as she did so, and whilst her hand, still resting on his arm, so moved Marlin, that, in spite of his stubborn resolve not to let any sign of emotion escape, he took the pretty blue veined member reverently and raised it to his lips, the door opened, and Mrs. Tennant sailed into the room. She bridled, and looked conscious, as one who has just discovered a love affair ; but Cecil, drawing her hand from Captain Marlin, advanced to meet her guest, saying as she did so,

“ Now, Moses, you shouldn’t have done that, you know ; I didn’t mean you to do it, and as I am not really the Queen, it only makes a fool of me. I am sure Mrs. Tennant must think we have been talking of something very different from the real subject of our conversation. Confess now, didn’t you think it a funny situation, Mrs. Tennant ?”

“ Well, really,” answered that lady, “ I should think it a very curious situation ; but then I sup-

pose you are accustomed to adventures of that sort, and don't mind them."

"No, I shouldn't think you have much experience in matters of that kind," said Marlin, viciously angry, first at the interruption, and then at the interpretation he saw she was putting on his inadvertent action; "you are much too"—plain a person he was going to have said, but substituted the word "proper" instead; not that the first accusation would have been literally true as regarded looks, but the elderly lady was certainly wanting in that fascination that constituted the younger one's chief charm.

"Well, I suppose the subject of our conversation was no secret, Moses," went on Cecil, coming smilingly to the rescue of her friend's temper. "Shall I tell it?"

"Oh! by all means," he answered. "Marlin's gone to the dogs, that's all, Mrs. Tennant, and is going to sell out. I had just called to tell our Queen about it, and she was persuading me to stay, or rather trying to persuade me."

"And you will, won't you?" asked Cecil eagerly. She liked Marlin, he was so amusing,

so daringly and audaciously wicked in his talk—in a way that, while it shocked her, was yet not unfit for even a girl like her to hear; besides, she was sure that once out of the regiment, and unrestrained by any rules, he would get into difficulties far more quickly than he had hitherto done; and so, moved by a very earnest desire to befriend him, she went on: “Come and talk the matter over again with me before you settle on it finally; if your papers have been sent, I will persuade the Colonel to take no notice of them, until you think the matter over again. Promise me you’ll do this, won’t you?”

“No good, Queen; I was a perfect idiot to speak about the matter at all. I had settled it in my own mind, but I wanted to get some good advice from you about a little plan I had in my head relating to the future Mrs. M. Never mind, I daresay you wouldn’t approve my projects, you’d think them too mercenary,” continued Marlin; “but when a fellow’s cleaned out, he can’t afford to be so particular about the means of getting more tin.”

"Your sentiments do you credit, Captain Marlin," sneered Mrs. Tennant. "Many men think as you, but few dare to give such bold utterance to their thoughts."

"Captain Marlin always says out what he thinks," cried Cecil, standing up for her friend; "and, indeed, I am sure he is right, though I suspect he often says a little more than he really means. Don't you?"

He only looked at her a little quizzically, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, when two or three more gentlemen came in, and soon the conversation became general; but Cecil felt painfully conscious that Mrs. Tennant's eye followed her everywhere, and that when that lady and Mrs. Brown got together in a corner, it was for the express purpose of discussing the scene just described, and bemoaning her foolish, unprincipled behaviour. When the guests began to disperse, Marlin again approached her, and as he shook hands with her, he muttered,

"That old cat will have a nice story going about the Cantonment with regard to my foolish act just now. I'm so sorry. I can't think how

I could have been such a fool, when I might have known people would be coming in every minute. Do you forgive me?"

"Of course," she answered, smiling. "I don't mind what they say; I know you meant nothing by it. At the same time, understand, sir, it is too courtly a fashion for me, and had I guessed your intention, I would certainly not have allowed it."

"It is very good of you to take it so," he replied, "as you don't know what trouble that old hag may get you into. Don't I know, from the glitter of her eye, the confounded jade means mischief?"

"Oh! hush!" she cried, putting up her hand warningly. "Don't call her such dreadful names. No doubt she's not nice, but that's too bad. But how do you think she'll get me into trouble? Do you know, I hardly can realise what trouble or annoyance is. You have all so shielded me from anything of the kind, that I can't fancy its ever reaching me."

"And indeed I hope it never may," he answered, fervently. "If that harridan worries you

tell me, and see if I don't bring her to reason, or my name's not Marlin."

And so saying he left her, thinking that, if slander or evil report touched that bright young life through his means, he would never forgive himself. And yet he feared his foolish, selfish action, the outburst of a love not strong enough to do and dare all, though quite powerful enough to be a very potent mainspring of all his thoughts and deeds, would bring grief and mischief on her; and the worst of it was, he did not see in what way he could prevent evil consequences from following his ill-advised freedom. He wished most fervently it was allowable to muzzle dangerous females of the gossip species; and, oh! with what pleasure he would fit the head-gear on to the *passée*, faded face of Mrs. Tennant. How he would buckle up the straps, he thought, with savage glee! He didn't call her pretty, and a woman who was not so, and who had angered him, would get very little mercy, at least in thought, from the excitable, scatter-brained Captain.

Cecil, when she was once more left alone,

thought, with a little careless vexation, of this adventure. It never entered into her head such a slight foolish affair could cause her any great and lasting annoyance, even when she saw Marlin's uneasiness on that score; but she did think Mrs. Tennant's manner disagreeable at the time, and knew also she had been talking the affair over with Mrs. Brown afterwards; and she had an instinctive dread of giving those two ladies any power over her, from a vague idea that they might make themselves very unpleasant, if they got the chance.

"I do wish he hadn't done it," she mused. "Whatever possessed him I cannot think, the ultra-devotional is so very foreign to his usual form. I wonder if Anstruther will hear of it, and, if he does, what he will think of me? Not that I could have helped it," she mentally added. "If I had had an idea of what was coming I should never have allowed it. Papa," she went on, "when will Captain Anstruther be out again? I have been talking to several people about the pic-nic I want to get up, but, at any rate, it shan't be till he's able to join us."

"Well, little woman, your patience will be tried, as I am sure he will not be fit for anything of the kind for at least a month; do you think you can wait so long?"

"Oh! yes, that will do very well," she replied, thinking that, whatever the fun of detecting Villars's foppery and tanning his hands might be, still the party would be a very dull concern to her if a certain dark, manly, good-looking face were not beside her now and then, paying her little attentions that were nothing from anybody else, and were so particularly pleasant to her from him.

Forgetting all her late uneasiness in these meditations, she went off to gather flowers in her little garden, and make up a bouquet for the invalid, to whose quarters she knew her father would presently be going.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THE CANTONMENT THOUGHT OF IT.

A DAY or two passed over without Cecil's hearing any more of Mrs. Tennant, or the little scene at which she had assisted ; so that she congratulated herself on the matter having blown over so quietly, and laughed a little at Captain Marlin's fears, and vituperation of Mrs. Tennant. Fears and abuse that now seemed quite unnecessary, for, as far as the young girl could judge, nothing could be better than the way in which that lady had acted, even if her manner had been a little unpleasant at the time.

And after all, it was not unnatural it should be so, as Cecil thought with a smile, picturing to herself how very much taken aback and

awkward she would feel if she had surprised a similar scene in Mrs. Tennant's drawing-room. "Not but that there is a great difference between us," she thought, with the conscious pride of a young, light-hearted, admired girl in her liberty and beauty, which give her the right to claim and receive admiration from all around; whereas, in a married woman, it is wrong, even positively wicked, corrected the young dreamer, thinking, with the greatest tinge of the proverbial feminine malice for a rival that her gentle nature had ever felt, of certain spiteful remarks she had heard made relating to Mrs. Tennant's flirting propensities.

"What a horrid malicious thing I am becoming!" she exclaimed suddenly to herself, remembering her occupation; "I have no right to think hardly of that other poor woman, when I am doing just as bad myself. Dear me! it is difficult never to think evil of others, if one doesn't like them. I wonder do men never talk or think as badly of their fellow-men; they pretend not, but then," she added, with a saucy toss of her head, "I have lived too long among

them to believe quite all I hear about their dislike to gossip, and their forbearance towards unpleasant comrades. I know I've heard some of them touch up those they disliked, in a way that I thought sufficiently cutting; and as to Marlin," here Cecil fairly laughed out at the recollections called up, "I don't believe any woman in the world could talk as he does when he is put out."

These reflections were occupying her mind five days after the scene related in the last chapter. She was sitting in her drawing-room, work in hand, at the time; she was never a very industrious young person, but to-day, partly because she was dreaming away as I have described, and partly because it was near the hour for the arrival of her friends, and she didn't think it worth while to set regularly to work for those few minutes, she was even more idle than usual. She had not much time for musing, however, as, before many minutes had elapsed, Paget made his appearance alone.

For a minute or two the young Queen was

puzzled to know whether his early appearance was the result of accident or design. In all the years she had known this good-natured, simple Major, he had never come to her with any difficulties to be recounted, or advice to be asked; because, as she shrewdly suspected, his stolid unmoveable character acted as an effectual safeguard in all troublesome situations, the plainest, easiest, most upright course of action being the only one the worthy Major could see; and, consequently, being never in difficulties, he never wanted counsel. It was not at all unfrequent with him, however, to beg the Queen to administer a few words of correction or advice to unruly subs; and these young gentlemen were often much at a loss to imagine whence Cecil derived such an accurate knowledge of their wild doings.

Now she concluded it must be on some such mission Paget was bent, and, after the first few words, waited for him to broach the subject.

"I want to ask you about something," he began abruptly; and then paused, looking down

on the floor, and evidently at a loss how to proceed.

Cecil couldn't help smiling as she came to his rescue, by asking,

"Is it about your own affairs?"

"Yes; partly that, partly other people's."

Here there was a pause again, and the girl, who well knew the difficulty Major Paget always experienced in saying more than two or three words at a time, felt bound to make a little diversion.

"Take my word for it," she said, smiling, "leave other people's affairs to take care of themselves, unless you have been asked to interest yourself in them. It sounds odd my giving such advice, too, doesn't it?—as my chief business seems to be listening to things that don't concern me; but it's sound counsel, notwithstanding, and approved by the wisdom of all ages."

Major Paget, however, looked even more restless and unhappy after hearing this, and at last blurted out,

"You're right, no doubt; but I must tell you,

only you shall hear about me first." He paused for a minute to collect his thoughts, and then went on. "I had a letter from my father this mail; in which he told me my uncle, his brother, had died, and left me a large property. He wants me to sell out, go home, and settle down as a country gentleman; he says it's what I was always best suited for. Do you think so, Queen?"

She felt almost inclined to smile at the Major's distressed face, whilst telling a piece of news that would have given most men unbounded delight, and could not quite make out why he was not as pleased as he certainly ought to have been. She therefore answered him by another question.

"What do you think yourself, Major? Do you feel inclined for a country life?"

"Indeed, I don't," he replied, earnestly. "I tell you what it is, Cecil; if I leave the regiment to go and settle down among pigs, and sheep, and cattle, I shall just get as stupid and dull as they. I love 'Ours,' he went on, "and I should hate to be a country squire. I should

have to be a magistrate, then ; and I shouldn't like condemning men to be hanged, or transported, if they did take my sheep and things. I'm sure, as every head of stock disappeared, I should feel nearer freedom."

"But, you know, it wouldn't be necessary for you to be a magistrate—at least, I think not," corrected Cecil, whose ideas on the subject of English rural law were misty ; "and I'm sure you wouldn't have to sentence people to death or transportation. I know it's the judge does that," she added, confidently, as one who felt sure of her footing in the matter.

"Really, is that the case ?" asked the Major. "Well, I'm glad to hear it, but even if I hadn't to be a magistrate, I don't think the life would suit me, so what do you think I had better do ? You see, I don't want to be unkind to the governor, when he seems anxious for my return."

"And yet you don't think the life would suit you ; I understand the difficulty," answered Cecil, musing for a minute or two, and then looking up brightly, she went on : "I am all on

your side, Major. I can quite understand how very dull and stagnant a quiet, easy life would be to you now, accustomed as you always have been to the stir and bustle of military surroundings; therefore, I should, in your place, write and tell my father that the regiment was under orders to return to England, and that, under any circumstances, you thought it better to defer selling out until you had seen him, and talked the matter over with him. On your return, you know, you could at once obtain leave, and would be able to state your reasons for remaining in the army much better in person than in writing; or, if you found your presence at home really necessary, you could then leave the service whenever you like."

"You are right, Queen," answered the Major. "I never thought of our going home so soon. That settles the matter splendidly!"

He paused and remained silent, digging away at the mat under his feet with his cane, and evidently not knowing how to broach the next subject.

"What can it be he has to talk about?"

thought Cecil; "he is always a little dull, but never awkward, as he is to-day. I wonder what can be the matter? However, I suppose I had better start him," so she went on. "And now, Major, as that is all arranged, what is the next business you want me to talk over with you? I am half afraid it must be something serious, you look so grave."

"Can't you guess?" he asked suddenly, looking straight up at her, with his kindly dark brown eyes fixed full on hers.

"No, indeed," she answered, meeting his gaze calmly, but with a keen feeling of astonishment at his unusual manner.

"Then it can't be true," he went on, after a few moments' steady scrutiny of her surprised face; "but I'd better tell you all the same—it will warn you to be careful. You won't mind my speaking very plainly, and perhaps, as you may say, harshly to you, Cecil—will you? You see, I have known you since you were a baby, and cannot bear that anyone should dare to speak a spiteful, trifling word of you. Now some one has been spreading idle, foolish re-

ports about you through the Cantonment, which at first I feared might have a slight foundation of truth in some gay childish action misconstrued ; but you seem so utterly ignorant of anything of the kind, I begin to suspect the whole story is a fabrication."

Here Paget paused, out of breath. In all his honest, simple life he had perhaps never before made so long a speech, and seemed quite surprised at his own success in that line.

As for Cecil, at first she had not the remotest conception what he was driving at ; but as he finished, her last week's adventure, and Marlin's evident fear of its consequences, darted into her mind. She turned towards the Major, flushing brightly, but not one whit daunted, so sure was she of his true friendship and loyal faith in her word, as she answered—

"Tell me the story you have heard. A circumstance did happen last week that, maliciously misrepresented, would sound badly for me, though, as it really occurred, I feel in no way to blame. Tell me the current version, and I will tell you the true one."

"To give you the matter in a few words, it is this," he replied: "they say that some one going into your drawing-room last Thursday saw Marlin taking liberties with you that he should never have permitted himself to attempt with any young lady to whom he was not engaged; and if you and he are so, the fact should at once be made public, to disarm slander."

He stopped, and looked at her quietly. She met his look quite as calmly as before, but with a hot red flush burning on cheek and brow, as she answered—

"How cruel!—how shameful! It is Mrs. Tennant who has made up that story, and this is what she saw." Whereupon she repeated exactly what had happened, ending by saying, "Could I help it, Major? And there was no real harm in it, though harm could be made out of it."

The girl's face was so distressed, and her voice so plaintive, that strong, brave Paget, with the tender, simple heart, was almost moved to take her in his arms, and soothe

away her fears, as a father would comfort his frightened child ; but he restrained himself, thinking—"I blame Marlin for his foolish, impulsive act, which has led to all this, and I am almost giving way to a worse and more mischievous impulse myself. Poor little thing!" he added aloud—"I see how the case stands, and am very angry with Marlin, whose thoughtlessness has got you into this scrape. I fear it will trouble you for some time—people are so prone to believe evil. Happily, we leave this in six weeks."

"But you believe me, don't you, Major?" she pleaded ; "you know I have done no wrong."

"Indeed I do believe you," he replied. "I should as soon doubt my own truth as yours. After all, Cecil, you are but a child ; this is your first experience of the evil of the world, and, of course, you find it very bitter. In time, when greater trials come, you will laugh at the misery this has caused you. You will be more careful now, I am sure, to guard against any act or word that may give rise to evil speaking."

So saying, the kind-hearted Major went off

to find Leveston in his own little snugery, and left the poor little Queen to collect her spirits before the arrival of her guests.

How indignant she was when she found herself alone! Indignant with that viper, Mrs. Tennant, whose cruel tongue had raised such trouble around her. She would have liked to cry, but knew that it would spoil her looks, and make her eyes red, before the arrival of the company; and then she felt that those who believed evil of her, would say—"See, she knows she has been discovered, and has been crying about it; serve her right, too, for her naughty conduct." Whilst her friends would say—"It is true, then, after all. She is sorry about it, and we will forgive her, but she shouldn't have done it; and we can't think quite the same of her in future." Therefore she kept back the tears, that would rise so rebelliously to her eyes, and laughed her gayest welcome to young Villars, who had become quite a regular attendant at the levée, by way of judging for himself if all that Mrs. Tennant had told him was true. He too had heard the stories going about the Can-

tonment ; and he even knew more than Paget, for he had heard Captain Marlin indignantly deny them, and tell the true version, as Cecil had told it to the Major. He knew more of Mrs. Tennant's real feelings towards Cecil than perhaps anyone else in the regiment ; therefore, on hearing Marlin's account, he recognised its truth, and became on the spot one of the staunchest upholders of Cecil's innocence.

All inclined more or less to Marlin's version, some thinking, perhaps, that Cecil had not been so averse to his devotion as she had said, but believing fully that nothing worse than a foolish plagiarism of royalty had been enacted.

Yet these men who judged their Queen so leniently would have been just as ready to judge most women hardly as any other men ; only, they could not look on her shortcomings, even had they believed in them, in quite the same light as they would those of any one else. She was to them still the Queen of the Regiment—their pet, their Queen, to be spoiled and made much of when she pleased them best ; to be wondered at, perhaps, a little, and excused

with a laugh, if, in the exuberance of her gay, childish spirits, she committed some wild or thoughtless act.

“Poor child!” said Colonel Meredith, when he first heard the story, “hasn’t even she escaped the gossip of the world? I don’t believe a word of the tale, it sounds trumped up, but I’ll ask Marlin about it. And if anything did occur to give rise to it, I suppose it was only some nonsense of the child’s. We have none of us been very strict with her, and she doesn’t yet know what harm the world’s evil tongue can do her.”

It was thus the officers of the —th Dragoons excused their Queen and comrade. It was the first offence, if offence there was, and she was so young. She must be pardoned, even though she seemed unaware of her guilt, and not in the least inclined to beg for pardon; for when her guests assembled that day, after Major Paget’s interview, had they known the subject of conversation a few minutes before, they would have wondered at their young hostess’s gaiety and high spirits.

For she was determined, she said to herself, that they should not see she minded this cruel slander ; she would meet them just as frankly, just as kindly, as ever. And she laughed and jested, with a tinge more of bitterness in her merriment than any had ever noticed there before ; but of the depth to which the poisoned shaft had struck, of the anguish her proud, pure mind endured, that was the only sign she gave. Once, however, as young Villars suddenly addressed her, whilst she busied herself at her tea-tray, she turned to answer his question, with her deep hazel eyes full of unshed tears, and a plaintive appealing look in their mournful gaze. He noticed it quickly enough, for, bound up as this young fellow was in his own good looks, he had yet begun to feel a very strong appreciation for those of others, as embodied in the Queen of the Regiment ; and feeling he had, in the first instance, been unjust to her, he strove to make amends by a devotion that bade fair to rival, and even outstrip, that of his brother officers.

He guessed, with the intuitive quickness of

one who loves, perhaps not deeply, but still purely and truly, what it was that troubled her, and taking advantage of a seat left empty for a moment beside her, in the recess of a window, he began.

"I wouldn't worry myself about it, Miss Cecil, if I were you. Marlin has told us all, and we know it was only that old hag's malice that made her slander you so. We none of us believe her story, and wouldn't even if we hadn't heard the true version."

She laughed softly as he glanced savagely at Mrs. Tennant, sitting not far from them, but still out of earshot.

"I am so glad you do not think badly of me," she went on. "But I thought you used to like Mrs. Tennant?"

"Did I?" he replied; "but that was an age ago. I seem to have lived so much, and to have grown so much wiser since then. How long is it since I and the Tennants were friends?"

"Not much more than ten days," she laughed. "Oh! the fickleness of men!—and you speak as if it were centuries past."

"Just see how audaciously Cecil Leveston is flirting," whispered Mrs. Brown here, to her friend and ally the Captain's lady. "I should have thought, after the discovery of her goings on you made the other day, none of the men would have had anything to say to her."

"I do believe," answered Mrs. Tennant, "that men like that kind of thing. That young goose Villars is twice as devoted, now he knows something really bad about her, as ever he was before;" which remark showed that, though the lady had assiduously cultivated Villars' acquaintance, she had not yet fathomed how much real nobleness of character lay under his foppish exterior, and did not see that the great secret of his sudden devotion for Cecil was the feeling that she had been cruelly maligned.

Cecil really began to like the young fellow that afternoon, and he would willingly have absorbed all her thoughts and attention, had she permitted such a monopoly; but she was ever too attentive to her friends to allow any one, no matter how pleasant, to take up her

whole time, and therefore in this instance, as always, kept free from any suspicion of favouring one brother officer at the expense of others.

Anstruther, while all this was going on, heard, as he lay in his dull, hot sick-room, the stories current of her whom he worshipped as the brightest and purest of women—heard them, and after a time heard also Marlin's indignant denial of them. He knew all along, he told himself, that they were false, shameful fabrications; he was delighted they were disproved, and yet he would keep thinking, with a savage unreasoning jealousy, of Marlin's thoughtless caress of that small white hand he had so often admired.

“Confound the fellow!” he thought; “what does he mean by going on in that way, and getting the poor child into trouble? He ought to have more consideration; none but he would have acted so.” Thinking which, he groaned impatiently, and asked Menton, who had just come into the room, when he should be able to get about again.

“Take it easy, man,” replied the good doctor,

now getting rather grey-headed. "If you keep quiet you'll be going out a little in another month; but you mustn't plunge about in your bed as you did just now, or you'll be longer."

"Good heavens! what an age the old fool wants to keep me shut up!" was Anstruther's ungracious mental comment on this speech. "I want so much to see her, and find out from herself how she felt about all these reports. Will she be as kind to me as she used to be, I wonder? or will she think, when I speak to her freely, that I am presuming on what she has done for me? Here's Leveston, however; I suppose he has heard these stories also."

But, after a few questions, it became evident to Anstruther that Leveston, being one of the people most concerned in this gossip, had of course heard nothing of it; and the young man was for a minute or two puzzled whether it would be better he should be told, or left to hear it by chance. He decided at last on the latter alternative.

"I will speak to Cecil about it," he thought; "but Leveston is so melancholy and sensitive,

it would probably wound him deeply to think his darling had been ill-naturedly spoken of, and would make him morbidly alive to every word or action connected with her in future. He might very likely, from over-anxiety, make her unhappy, and do no good."

Thus the matter was allowed to drop into oblivion; and Cecil, hearing no more about it, and meeting the same kind looks as usual, recovered all her old spirits, and thought no more of the matter; not knowing, poor child, in her innocence, that scandal, no matter how deep you may bury it, has, when accidentally disinterred, even after the lapse of years, a scorpion-like power of stinging, almost as venomously as when it first sprung into existence.

CHAPTER X.

A RIDE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

THE weeks passed slowly away to Anstruther lying on his sick-bed, and his recovery was retarded by the fierce impatience of confinement he had felt ever since he had heard the story about Cecil related in the last chapter.

When all the rest had completely forgotten the matter, and looked up to their Queen with as great admiration as ever, he, having nothing else to disturb the monotony of his life, kept turning the affair over and over in his mind, the evil—for, if it was nothing else, there was evil in the mere fact of her having been spoken of—assumed more gigantic proportions every

time he thought of it, as is the nature of such things to do when brooded over.

He would have been a much wiser man in every way, if he had banished the matter from his mind entirely, as beneath his notice ; or, at least, waited to think about it until he could hear from the girl's own innocent lips what she had felt and suffered in the matter. But Anstruther was not a bit wise now, he was simply desperately in love with the prettiest bright-eyed child, as he often told himself in his self-torturing exercises, in all the Indian Empire. For he had no idea she was more than a mere child in feelings ; in years she had certainly just entered the period when all men must admire her, and many love her ; but that the secret power, at once the greatest blessing, and too often, alas ! the greatest curse of a woman's existence, had ever stirred the still, quiet depths of her young heart, he never dreamed ; and even had he known that it was so, he would have been very far from imagining himself the hero of her innocent worship. Rather he was prone to think any of his brother officers might be more fortunate than he,

and especially that hair-brained fellow Marlin, who had already by his thoughtlessness, done her one wrong, but whose versatile, social talents, he could not help fearing, might dazzle her and blind her judgment to the grave faults in his character.

"I do believe she likes him," he would groan to himself sometimes, whilst tossing feverishly from side to side; "I remember now how she used to laugh at his jokes, and how pleased she always was to see him at her teas, and—"

Here his meditations were interrupted by Leveston's entrance, carrying, as usual, a lovely bouquet of flowers for the invalid from Cecil.

This cheered him up a little, and he was still further enlivened when Guy went on—

"I daresay you haven't heard that Marlin leaves us to-morrow; he sent in his papers a week ago or so, and he has got leave of absence, pending the appearance of his name in the Gazette. He called on us to say good-bye just now. Cecil and I did all we could to persuade him to stay

and come home with us, but he 'wouldn't. To tell you the truth, I think he has got into some entanglement with that half-caste girl Lottie Bourke, and he is in such a fright about it, he thinks he will never get away quick enough."

"He had better look sharp, then," replied Anstruther, with a more cheerful laugh than he had given for some time.

"I think I have heard that Papa Bourke is rather a hard customer to deal with, and that he managed the marriage of Lottie's eldest sister very cleverly, in spite of the bridegroom's reluctance to take the fatal step. When do we leave? Have you heard yet?"

"In three weeks time, I think, we march from here, and at once, on arriving at Bombay, embark on board the *Crocodile*. You won't be much more than fit to travel by the time we leave this. How slow you have been about getting well," answered Leveston.

"I feel better this evening," said Anstruther gaily; "I think I shall be quite well soon. And now tell me, have you no more news?"

What has the gay world been saying or doing lately?"

"Ah! that reminds me, we give a picnic this day fortnight; a very grand affair. All Poonah is asked; and we finish up with a dance. Cecil was very anxious it should be put off till you were out again, but Menton said you wouldn't be fit for a picnic, in this heat, for some time to come, so she was obliged to do without you."

How Anstruther's heart leaped with delight as he heard this proof of the Queen's thoughtfulness for him. He said nothing, but mentally resolved not to worry himself in future, so that he might be well enough to appear at their last entertainment in India, in spite of the doctor's verdict. "I won't tell him, or anyone," he thought; "for, no doubt, if he knew my plans, he might prevent my carrying them out. I will drive out quietly after them, and surprise them all with my sudden re-appearance among them." He then questioned Leveston closely as to where the picnic was to be, when they were to set out, and all the other particulars

that he thought might be of use in executing his design.


After Marlin had left, and Cecil found she did not miss him quite so much as she had expected and told him she would, she was so busy paying farewell visits, taking long early rides to all her favourite haunts, and, above all, amusing herself so well with croquet parties and dances, got up by the hospitable friends they were about to part from, probably for ever, that she hardly bestowed a thought on him. Now and then, as she returned from some particularly pleasant party, a recollection of him would flash across her mind. "Poor Marlin!" she would say, "how he would have enjoyed it!—and I never missed him! Really it was very bad of me, but every one is so kind, and I am so happy, I can't stop to think of the absent." And then, with a kind of flash, her mind would revert to Anstruther, and she would smile softly, thinking to herself, "I remembered him. I wonder when I shall dance with him again." And then her mind would wander off into never-ending musing about her friend Gerald—

whether he thought of her ever, and then go on through the countless ramifications a subject so well-beloved wanders into.

Thus it is with the young and happy. Even when not actually and actively selfish, the mind takes its keenest delight only in itself and the one beloved object that is more and dearer self than one's own actual being. For that object alone great sacrifices are willingly rendered, before we have met with trouble in life, and know that, repine as we will, it is our lot and portion constantly to be sacrificed, and to sacrifice ourselves for those in whom we have little interest. For the beloved object, also, those little constant efforts of self-forgetfulness are made, that we rarely, if ever, attempt for any but that one ; therefore, though Cecil wondered at her easy oblivion of her old friend Marlin, and hated her own heartlessness, we cannot be astonished at it, and think it but the natural failing of a young though true and tender heart, whose interest was entirely bound up, unawares to herself, in the life of another.

The day for the picnic arrived at last. The

spot selected was a shady tope of large trees, near which stood the ruins of an ancient temple. The place was only three or four miles from Poonah, and everything was so comfortably arranged, and such crowds of servants were in attendance, that, but for the flickering sunlight darting in now and then through the thick foliage overhead, the company might almost have imagined themselves sitting round the table of some commodious bungalow. The day, as we have said, arrived at last, but as the hour of meeting at the appointed place was not till about five o'clock in the afternoon, Cecil concluded such a late entertainment need not interfere with her ordinary method of amusing herself in the morning. She was in the habit of taking early solitary rides through the most secluded and well-known paths in the neighbourhood. She always rode without a groom, being a perfect horsewoman, and quite competent to help herself in any ordinary emergency. She disliked, above all things, having a servant a few paces behind her, noting her smallest actions ; detailing how his young lady galloped



her horse here, or sauntered along there; how she bowed to this one, and smiled and spoke to the other. And therefore, having set her face against such attendance from the very first, she now went without it, quite sure by so doing she excited no comment. It was her way, people said, and were content.

Accordingly, at her usual hour, the morning of the day on which the picnic was to be held, Tornado came round as usual; and Cecil mounting, trotted off in the highest possible spirits, taking one of the most unfrequented roads about. She was in her gayest humour, and cantered on for a mile or two at the gallant chestnut's best speed; then noticing he was getting warm, she slackened her pace and sauntered slowly onwards, falling into a deep reverie as she went.

It would be hard to tell what bright dreams she wove for herself under that gay morning sunshine, how she revelled in the thoughts of the pleasure the afternoon would bring her, and repeated softly to herself that no one was surely ever as happy as she. "The world is so

bright and goodly," she murmured, "the people I meet so kind and true; my friends here, my dear brother officers, how they overwhelm me with care and affection! I am not worthy of it, and can never repay them, let me try my best to please them. And some people say the world is so hard and bad; what can be the reason? To me it seems so pleasant I would gladly live in it always. Then her thoughts roamed off to her intended trick on Villars; and from that her mind wandered on from subject to subject, till she remembered suddenly that Gerald would not be there.

"How very provoking!" she thought almost pettishly; "that spoils all. Dr. Menton says he is almost well, but not fit for so much exertion yet! I shall not half enjoy myself if I do not see his kind old face; he might have tried to be well in time, as he must have known we should all like to see him." And then she wondered whether he would care more to know that she missed him than to know that all his brother officers shared the feeling in common with her; she had almost rather, she thought,

that she alone regretted him ; he would feel more like her own particular property then.

This topic of reflection always lasted her a long time, and it was not until the burning rays of the sun, beating down on her unshaded head, warned her that it must be getting late, that she thought of returning. She stopped and looked around her, that she might judge how far she was from the contonment, and how long it would take her to return. To her surprise she found herself in an entirely strange tract of country. On every side, as far as her eye could reach, there was no landmark that she recognised, neither could she discern any dwellings near at which she might inquire the road home. Not far off, however, to her right, rose a low hill, crowned on its summit by a clump of wide spreading trees. Thither she resolved to ride, hoping, from the slight elevation afforded by the hill, she might be able to discern some point that would give her a clue to her whereabouts.

She reached the hill at length, though it was further off than she had at first thought. From

its summit her view, though more extensive, was just as bewildering as that on lower ground. The country stretching before her seemed to repeat itself in every direction ; one field being the exact image of the other, one tope of trees the duplicate of that next it, and so on. Her eyes wearied looking over the monotonous expanse, and presently even filled with tears as she began to fear she had lost herself, and, appalling thought, might not be back in time for the picnic ! But the tears called up by this disastrous image dried quickly as she reflected they would not have the party without her, and in that case it would only be put off till to-morrow. However, there was still lots of time, and she might get back long before. If she could only make out in what direction the town lay, all difficulty would soon be over, as, by riding straight forward, she must ere long come in sight of some landmark that would guide her safely home.

But in what direction should she go ? That was the question. All around looked the same to her, and she even could not make out the

path by which she had gained the hill. It was necessary, however, she should come to some decision, and turning her horse's head towards what she thought the most cultivated-looking country, she rode rapidly onwards. But at the end of a quarter of an hour she found herself more bewildered than ever, her horse covered with foam and sweat, she herself nearly fainting from heat and distress of mind, whilst not a human being appeared in sight, to whom she could apply for guidance. She reined up, under the shade of another cluster of trees; and now, hopeless of help for the present, blamed herself bitterly for her thoughtlessness and inattention, which had brought her into this distressing situation. As the full loneliness of her position dawned upon her, she bowed her head on her hands and burst into tears. She felt so utterly forsaken and miserable, and it did not make the matter one whit easier to bear, knowing it was all her own fault.

Tornado, tired, and glad of the shade and rest, stood motionless, turning his delicate ears to catch the distant sounds unheard by her. She almost

envied him his keener sense, for then she fancied she might hear some noise, borne from the far distance, indicative of human life. Here the silence was so oppressive that it alone frightened her, independent of the situation in which she found herself. If she had left the horse to choose his own road home in the first instance, no doubt he would have brought her back without any difficulty; but the idea of doing so simply never entered her mind, for, though a good rider, she hardly credited her steed with all the wonderful powers of instinct he, in common with all his kind, possessed.

How long she sat thus, her face covered with her hands, and hot tears of fear and disappointment dropping through her tiny fingers on to her horse's tawny mane, she could not tell. Suddenly she fancied she heard a foot-step near her, and knew that her horse moved his head to one side a little, as though looking at something approaching in that direction. She raised her head quickly, and dashing away the tears that blinded her, saw coming towards

her, indeed already almost beside her, young Hedworth Villars.

Her tears were those of a child, easily shed, and as easily dried. They vanished at once, as she held out both hands to the young man, saying,

“Oh! Mr. Villars, how glad I am to see you! You will take me home, will you not?”

“Certainly,” he answered, “nothing could give me greater pleasure. But what is the matter, Miss Cecil?” he added, dropping the ceremoniously polite style, and taking up his ordinary way of addressing her; “you seemed in trouble when I came up. Is it anything in which I can help you?”

The tears filled her eyes again, at the thought of the utter loneliness of her situation a minute or two before he arrived, but she smiled brightly through them as she answered,

“I am so foolish. I had lost myself, and didn’t know what to do, so I suppose I was frightened, and behaved like a baby. It was very silly of me, wasn’t it? But I am all right, now I have met you.”

"What a darling she is!" thought the young man, looking up into the sweet flushed face bent down towards him, and mistaking her delight at finding herself safe for pleasure at meeting him. "Decidedly she is my fate," he thought; "I must marry her before any of the other fellows get a chance, and settle matters at home afterwards."

It never entered Villars's head to imagine that, while liking him very much, and feeling very friendly towards him, the young lady, for whom he designed the honour of making her his wife, might not respond to his wishes. As said before, he had a very good opinion of himself on the score of personal attractions, and felt sure, if he had indeed ever allowed a doubt to enter his mind of their fascinations at all, that, backed up by his substantial moneyed qualities as well, they would be perfectly irresistible.

But, though these thoughts flashed through his mind, he could not help seeing this was not the time or place to declare them. The young lady, though feeling safe now, was still anxious

to return home as quickly as possible ; besides, she was exhausted by fatigue and anxiety ; he therefore contented himself with mounting his horse, which was tied to a tree near, and riding home beside her, explaining as he went how he happened to arrive so opportunely to her succour.

He had, during the short time he had been in India, devoted himself very assiduously to the pursuit of small game, and was accustomed to take his gun with him during his rides, hardly ever returning without a few partridge or quail, as trophies of his morning's canter. To-day he had been more unsuccessful, at least in the matter of sport ; but he did not complain, as, if chance had taken him into a country destitute of game, fate had rewarded his patient search for it by allowing him to be of service to the Queen of the Regiment.

He was very devoted during that ride home, and Cecil, in gratitude for her deliverance, was even more charming than usual. She smiled on him so sweetly, it really was no wonder the poor young man's head was turned, and he

thought himself the luckiest fellow that ever breathed to have won the affections of a girl like her. Indeed, he began to get so deeply and truly in love that he caught himself wondering once or twice what she could see in him to like ; he felt all his little faults and flaws suddenly standing out prominently before his mental vision, as though under the lens of a powerful magnifying glass, and, try to shuffle them out of sight or hide them as he might, they yet gave him a keen feeling of unworthiness. Yet, after all, this girl was, no doubt, not one bit better, perhaps not even more beautiful or charming, than hundreds of others for whom young Villars would have thought himself a thousand times too good. But love, when it is true, and is moreover felt by a young, inexperienced man, has a strange tendency to raise the worth and value of the loved one, whilst depreciating one's own.

Cecil really and truly had no idea of the havoc she was causing in the young man's heart. She saw he liked her, and she plumed herself not a little on the conquest she had made of his pre-

judiced mind. She had been too much accustomed to the silent homage of her brother officers to dream for one moment that this audacious sub. was applying to her regal personage the old line :—

“She is a woman, therefore may be won.”

No doubt during that ride she did give Villars a great deal of what from any other girl might well be called encouragement ; but it was given in all innocence and purity of heart, not dreaming that she might thereby raise hopes the crushing of which would cause pain keen enough truly, no matter how transient.

As they stopped before Leveston's door, and the young man, with a kind of manner not quite usual to him, helped her to alight, Mrs. Brown's ayah passed by. She glanced at the group presented by the hot jaded horses and the bright young riders, pausing for a moment to take it all in, and then hurried on her way. Cecil noticed her passing, and felt instantly, with an instinctive sense of coming trouble, that her morning's adventure would be made the subject of talk through the cantonment.

“But at least,” she mentally added, “they can make no harm out of that, though they may think me dreadfully stupid to lose myself within ten miles of the town.”

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE RUINED TEMPLE.

CECIL was very tired when she got in ; and no wonder—it was nearly ten o'clock, and the heat intense. She found her father in some slight anxiety about her prolonged absence. He had not been able to get out that morning, being on duty, or he would have accompanied her, as was his custom when not prevented by business. The account she gave, of having lost herself, and of the terror and misery she suffered in consequence, alarmed him.

“ You must not go so far again ! ” he exclaimed ; “ you might have met with some accident, or got really lost, and then what should I do if

we could not find you? Promise me, child, you will be more careful in future."

His distress moved Cecil, who promised willingly enough; she having been too much frightened to be anxious for a renewal of her experience.

However, by the time they set off in the afternoon for the place of rendezvous, all her fatigue and trouble had vanished. They made a very large and merry party, forming quite a procession of vehicles along the dusty road leading to the appointed spot. Cecil, her father, Colonel Meredith, Villars, and one or two more, had got possession of a large, roomy, old-fashioned carriage. It was a very heavy, lumbering affair, but, not to be behind either in appearance or speed, Villars had hunted up four horses for it, and though in looks they were the veriest screws ever stepped, yet they contrived to get over the ground in a very respectable, and rather exciting style; for not having worked as a team before, and one of the leaders never having been in any kind of harness, they manifested a strong inclination to set out

simultaneously for the four points of the compass. Once fairly started, however, a feat which took up a little time, and an immensity of shouting, plunging, and whipping, Villars contrived to make them lay their shoulders to the collar, and the party went off at a slapping pace, leading the way; for it was wisely considered, if they were put behind they might very likely run into the vehicle before them.

A queer-looking turn-out it was; but the team, though wild and odd, began after a little to do good work together, and went ahead at a pace that soon took them out of sight of the rest of the party, and promised to bring them to the place of rendezvous long before the guests would arrive.

Cecil sat up on the box with Villars, who was driving, and, being entirely devoid of fear in anything connected with horses, viewed the obstreperous start with perfect coolness, and enjoyed the rapid motion, when they were once fairly off, with the zest and relish of a child.

Villars had not much time for doing the agreeable during the drive; the team required rather more attention than he had anticipated; indeed, he began to think it might be found very hard to stop them, now they were away, at the speed they were going. He tried to take hold of them once or twice, but, finding they paid no attention to the pressure of the bit, he let them alone, rattling them up the hills at top speed, and trusting to the slighter declivity on the other side, and his own skill in driving, to keep them safe in descending. Colonel Meredith remarked once or twice, with his easy careless laugh,

“I shouldn’t like to lend a team of mine to that young Villars. Did you ever know anything like the way he drives? I only hope he won’t break all our necks.”

But even whilst he said this, neither he nor any of the others had the least idea the horses were quite beyond control, either of Villars or any other man.

Perhaps Cecil alone, sitting as she was on the driving-seat, had any knowledge of the

real state of affairs ; and she was just the one Villars was most desirous to keep in ignorance of their danger : so he remarked once to her, when the speed was of the wildest,

“ That’s a very tidy style of going, isn’t it, Miss Cecil ? ”

Cecil, at that instant, would perhaps have preferred a less dashing form, but she guessed his intent, so she answered, as though feeling quite pleased and comfortable, whilst a glance at his firmly compressed lips and knit brows showed how far from safe he thought them.

However, the rendezvous was half way up a steep hill, and, thanks to the rate of speed until then having been so fast and furious, and the collar work so continuous, the horses by that time were together in hand again, and were stopped without much difficulty.

“ Run to their heads, Ainslie ! ” shouted Villars, as soon as he got them to stand still ; “ if a carriage came up behind them now they might be off, unless they were held. That’s it ! Now, Miss Cecil, let me help you to get down.”

"Thanks for the drive," said Cecil, as she sprang lightly to the ground. "Do you always take them along in that style? Your hands seem to have suffered."

And so they had indeed; the two pair of gloves Cecil had heard so much about, and had so mischievously desired to expose, were torn almost to ribands by the friction of the reins, the inside pair showing plainly through the rents in the outer ones. He laughed as he pulled them off, and said,

"A necessary precaution, wasn't it, with those brutes? They have mouths of iron, I do think."

In spite of which clever turn off Cecil felt that she had made her discovery, and proved in that instance that report spoke truth.

Owing to the carriage in which she was seated having taken the lead, and gone completely away from the others, Cecil was not aware that, just after they set out, Anstruther had driven quietly up in his own little trap, and placed himself in the rear of the procession. The vehicle next him contained Major and Mrs Brown,

who were certainly very much astonished at his appearance.

They welcomed him, however, very cordially, as he was much liked, and in a few minutes the whole *cortège* set out. In the meantime, the party at the rendezvous had unharnessed their horses, and picketed them. Then, feeling it dull work waiting, they strolled through the grove, looking at the preparations for dinner, and perhaps wishing the time for attacking it had come.

Meredith and Leveston sat down on some stones, lit their cheroots, and were soon deeply engaged in conversation, whilst waiting the arrival of their guests, and the rest of their party. The others strolled about in different directions; Cecil and Villars soon becoming separated from the rest, and wandering off to the old ruined temple which formed the chief attraction of the place.

They entered the ruins, roamed in and out among them, admired the quaint old carvings on the tumbledown walls, and noticed how picturesquely the gorgeous tropical creepers had wound themselves over and around the crumb-

ling trophies of man's skill and pride. Cecil felt a little inclined to moralise on the scene before her, as some young untroubled hearts will, creating a fictitious sadness, which is so pleasant when it has no real root, by moaning over the instability and vanity of human greatness. But her companion had too real a source of anxiety in his heart to be interested in the pains or griefs of ages long passed away, and met all her retrospective musings with some bright reference to the gay present around them. "Leave those old Hindoos to the dust and cobwebs that have accumulated over their memories for centuries, and sit down here on the banks of this tiny rivulet that has most irreverently wormed itself an entrance into these silent walls of the dead, and wakes ghostly echoes from their mouldering walls, with its ceaseless babble all about the golden sunny present, laughter, and youth, and love."

She looked at him with pleased surprise beaming in her great hazel eyes.

"You are quite a poet," she said; "I am not, but I like hearing it. Tell me what the stream

says to you. I only hear an endless rippling, that wearies me with its monotony."

"Sit down, then," he answered; and she did so accordingly, he throwing himself down beside her. "I will teach you," he continued, "to read the voices of the brook. To most they tell a different tale, but what they say to you, and what they say to me, is probably the same, as we are both young; for the legends heard by the young always have a likeness to each other. The water tells me stories of a young man who loved a girl bright and beautiful, of whom, indeed, he was not worthy, save for the great love he bore her. It tells me how he carried her image in his heart, and crowned her with the brightest and the best hopes of his life; how he revered her as the ideal of all that is pure and good, and worshipped her as the queen of beauty and youth; but," he went on more sadly, whilst she listened, with a curious feeling that this legend in some way concerned herself—"but though the water tells me all this, it has not yet told me whether deep and true love prevailed—whether beauty was moved by earnest devotion, love

gained by love given. Tell me what do you think should be the ending? Will water-fairies make love prevail?"

She paused for a moment to think; even yet she had not fathomed the meaning of his allegory, but a tinge of sadness came over her, caused by the ceaseless monotonous murmur of the rivulet, and holding up her hand with a warning gesture, she answered,

"Don't you hear how low and soft the water sounds now, and a shadow seems passing over the sky? No, it is only the shadow of that bush falling on me, but it means just the same; the fairies are saying: 'Love does not always win love; sometimes its greatest and highest use is, through disappointment and grief, to allay the selfishness of the human heart. The youth you speak of must have needed some such lesson, for the legend goes on to say that the maiden he loved cared not for him—perhaps in truth she was not worthy of him. She may have been haughty and proud and cold; at any rate, the water-sprites do not say he broke his heart after her.'"

She laughed as she finished ; her sadness had passed off, and she was in too gay spirits to be sentimental.

“ See,” she continued, “ that tall lily is the Queen of the Fairies, and I am going to try and hit her with this bit of stick, for having made you melancholy.”

So saying, she began throwing small pieces of stick at a slender white lily that drooped over the water.

This was too much for young Villars. To him her conduct seemed shamefully trifling, as he never for one minute supposed it possible she had not understood his fairy tale ; and for a minute he was inclined to agree in her own verdict, and call her haughty, and proud, and cold. Springing up he seized her hands, as she was in the act of breaking off another bit of stick to cast at the lily queen.

“ Cease this folly,” he said sternly, with pale face and angry troubled eyes, looking full into hers. “ You shall not put me off in this way ; you have encouraged me in every possible manner, have done everything to lead me on, and now

tell me, with the greatest *sangfroid*, you don't love me. Don't be so cruel, Cecil, darling; surely you knew the mischief you were doing when you drew me after you so much."

She gazed at him, as he took her hands, and listened to his first words with her pretty mouth half open, her eyebrows raised, her whole expression one of bewildered surprise, not unmixed with fright; but as he finished, and waited for her to speak, she recovered herself.

"Ah! was all that about you? I didn't understand it. But you know what you are saying is all nonsense. I never intend to marry, and am not one bit in love with you or anyone else."

She believed what she said, poor child, not having experience enough to read the workings of her own heart.

"Do you mean to tell me," went on Villars passionately, "that you did not know you were doing wrong when you lured me after you day by day. You must have known, and you are only like the rest of your sex, false and fair, seeking for victims to your vanity, when I

thought you so good, and pure, and true. Oh! Cecil, love, think a little of all the pain you are causing—think of the love I bear you. Give me hope, give me time, and I will teach you to care for me. You are so young, you will soon feel for me as I feel for you.”

“I am so sorry, so very sorry,” she moaned. “I never knew I was doing wrong; no one had ever told me, and I acted to everyone as I did to you. Forgive me, oh! forgive me, and let us be friends again. I have only friendship to offer you. Will you not take it?” she said, stretching out her hand to him. He had released them some time before.

“I will not have it,” he answered angrily. “That which is as much any other man’s as mine has no value for me. Thanks for the offer all the same. Shall we return to the others?”

She got up slowly from her seat by the little river, and with a full saddened heart turned to seek her comrades. Villars walked beside her without speaking until they came in sight of the rest, who were all now assembled. Then he

left her without speaking, and roamed back again through the grove, trying to walk away a little of his agitation before he should have to appear in public.

In the meantime, Anstruther had arrived on the ground, and been warmly greeted by every one, the doctor alone excepted, who grumbled something about a relapse, and tried to insist upon his immediate return; but finding his patient obstinate in the course he had chosen for himself, Menton turned away, calling out, as a parting speech, "that he would be sorry for it."

"Where's our Queen?" asked Anstruther of Leveston, after the first greetings had been exchanged, and he could get a little quiet talk with his old friend.

"Oh! she's strolling about somewhere with Villars and Ainslie, I think; she'll be back again now, as soon as she hears we are all assembled."

"Come and take a turn with me, Captain Anstruther," said a low voice beside him; "I think I can help you to find Miss Leveston."

Anstruther turned, not that he needed to see the speaker to know who it was, the voice told him that plainly enough, but to shake hands with Mrs. Brown and accept the offer of her company.

They strolled off together, the young man's heart full of wild jealous feelings with regard to Villars and Ainslie, whom he at once appointed to the place in Cecil's heart supposed to be left vacant by the absence of Marlin; Mrs. Brown handsome, merry, well satisfied with herself and her good-looking companion, and really resolved to make herself as agreeable as possible. Most men would have said that was a very easy thing for Mrs. Brown to do. She had only to be and look herself to please most people's tastes, and she had a sufficient flow of that kind of easy, laughable conversation that passes so often for wit.

"I suppose Cecil is carrying on her morning's flirtation," said Mrs. Brown, when they were out of the crowd of people, and well on their way to the ruins. "She was out riding with young Villars early this morning, and didn't

come in till ten o'clock; my ayah saw them dismounting on their return. What a pity it is that so pretty a girl as she is should allow herself to take up that style; instead of getting herself married the quicker for it, she will find men avoid her, or at least only seek her society for a passing amusement."

Mrs. Brown was a tall blonde, with a profusion of lovely flaxen hair, languishing blue eyes, and a milk and rose complexion; so that being in quite a different style, she permitted herself to admire Cecil, without the slightest tinge of jealousy adding bitterness to her praise, at least when speaking to Cecil's friend. Now she was really sincere in regretting the fault she believed Cecil was falling into, and, moreover, had not the faintest idea that the man beside her entertained any deeper feeling for the Queen of the Regiment than the one all his brother officers shared in common with him.

They had entered the ruins as she finished speaking, when, looking up at her companion to see if he agreed in her verdict, she perceived

to her surprise that he was ghastly pale, and looked as if about to faint.

“ You are ill,” she exclaimed. “ I fear I have wearied you with my foolish chatter, and you have walked too far ; here is a stone, sit down on it and rest.”

He did as she told him, overcome more by the painful feelings her gossip had evoked than by the length of the walk, though that indeed was too much for him after his long illness. They had unconsciously chosen their resting-place within a few yards of the spot where Cecil and Villars were sitting beside the stream, but separated from them, and screened from observation by a crumbling bit of wall and a few straggling bushes.

Just as Anstruther seated himself, Villars had succeeded in making Cecil comprehend that he loved her ; she had told him she could not marry him, and her clear soft voice reached their ears, as she offered her friendship instead, saying, “ Will you not take it ? ” That part of the sentence they heard, not catching any of what went before, or even knowing that nothing dearer than

a friend's affection was proffered. They heard, too, his indignant rejection of it, telling her that what was shared with every other man had no value for him; and then, as the pair moved away, they were left in silence.

"What does it all mean?" gasped Mrs. Brown, thoroughly astonished. "I am afraid that foolish child has got herself into some scrape with her flirting. Young Villars seemed annoyed with her, and refused whatever it was she wanted to give him."

"What do you think is the meaning of it?" asked Anstruther hoarsely. "Women are generally much better at guessing what is at the bottom of a thing of that kind than men."

"Well, if you ask me, I should say love was the cause of the mischief, in this case as in most others," replied the lady; "one of them is in love, and has made some kind of proposal, or in some way let it be discovered; and, from what we heard, I fear it is Cecil who has been so very foolish and unwomanly. He, however, doesn't care for her, you see, and evidently more than suspects her of having flirted with

other men besides himself, as he tells her what any other man can share has no value for him. Don't you think that's the meaning of it? I can see no other solution of the mystery."

"It is the only one; I fear you are right," groaned Anstruther, turning away his head, that his companion might not read his secret on his countenance. "That young scoundrel Villars. I will make him suffer for his conduct to her when I am stronger. Whatever he thought, he should at least have spoken to her more gently. God help me, I trusted so in her! I thought all women might be false, wicked, and cruel, but that she at least was perfect, good, and true; and now to find her a flirt, a hardened coquette, offering herself to the first man she comes across, with money enough to suit her tastes, and whom she thinks sufficiently inexperienced to accept her offer! But she was mistaken there. What a humiliation for her, if she has any pride! But no, she can have none, or she would never have acted as she did. I think, Mrs. Brown, I will take Menton's advice and go home," he

added. "I feel too done up to stay out any longer."

With some difficulty he got back to the place where the dinner was being laid out; but when Cecil came forward to meet him with eyes smiling a sweet glad welcome, he almost turned from her, so bitter was the pang he endured, as the thought that her heart was another's, and only a flirt's facile, fickle smile was the portion reserved for him.

"Are you not well?" she asked anxiously. "Oh! you should not have been out; I am sure you will be ill again. Here, sit down in the shade, whilst I get you something to drink and eat. You must not move until you have taken it. Am I not right, Doctor?" she asked, appealing to Menton, who stood near.

"Right and kind as usual, little Queen," he answered, smiling his pleasant kindly smile on her; and by adding his authority to hers Anstruther was forced to sit down.

"What shall we give him, Doctor?" asked Cecil; "there is every kind of meat and drink here, but if I went on my own judgment, I

might do him harm, and I shouldn't like that," she added, looking at him with a smile. But he did not respond to her look; and when she returned with a glass of beverage recommended by the Doctor, he exclaimed, pettishly,

"I don't like that. I wish, Menton, you'd go and get me something else; it isn't right to keep Miss Leveston running about, attending on a sick fellow like me."

"Sick in your temper, you mean," muttered the doctor, going off as desired.

"How that man can be such a bear to the darling child, I can't think. If it had been poison she had brought me, I'd have drunk it."

Poor Cecil, abashed and frightened at her old friend's disagreeable humour, remained standing near him, tumbler in hand, looking the picture of misery. He took no notice of her, however, and after a few minutes' pause, pride and passion coming to her aid, she emptied the contents of the glass on the ground, saying, as she did so,

"Well, if you won't have it, I'm not going

to carry it about for other people. I thought you'd have liked what I brought you, Anstruther," she added, in the faint hope of touching his hard heart at last; but her attempt was vain, for he only answered sulkily,

"I'm sorry I couldn't oblige you."

That was enough. Cecil turned and left him—left with a strange new pain in her heart, and a strange new light of determination in her eyes. Turning to her guests, she began to do the honours of the picnic with a grace, a *verve*, a gaiety entirely her own, and which won fresh admiration from every one who saw her. Every feeling of her nature was outraged and up in arms against this old friend, who proved so false in the hour of trial. And such a trial, too! one that most men would have been grateful for, as affording them a legitimate excuse for devotion; for, it must be remembered, she could only ascribe this cruel change in his manner to the fact that she had saved his life, and he found the sense of obligation irksome. Therefore, pained and stung to the quick as she was, she resolved he at least should not see

it, he should never know the interest he had excited in her breast, he should never guess how sore her young, wild heart was at his contemptuous indifference.

Now she felt for the first time the temptation to flirt, to draw men's attention and admiration to her, whether by fair or illegitimate means ; it was so soothing to hear flattering words from other lips when his denied them, to meet looks of love from eyes that sought her everywhere, whilst his avoided her ; to know that she possessed a magic, a charm, a fascination for other hearts, though his remained unmoved. But one thing saved her,—it was not perhaps that she cared nothing for words, or looks, or power, if they came not from him, and were not exercised over him ; for, stung as she was, it would have been a kind of relief to her to feel and to show that others still sought her, though he might not think her worth seeking. It was rather the passionate accusation of young Villars, still ringing fresh in her ears, that she had allured and led him on, while knowing that she cared nothing for him ; and even whilst the

thought flashed through her mind of how easily she might captivate some of the butterfly worshippers now crowding around her, she determined that no man should again bring against her with truth the charge Villars had brought that day.


And still she was lovely and attractive—could see it in the smiling glances directed towards her, in the little attention showered on her, in the eager listening to her slightest word. Now, in the moment of her bitter sorrow, this vain triumph was more clearly perceived by her than ever before, for then she had been too much taken up with her childish innocent pleasures to observe the effect she produced. But she had sprung suddenly into a woman, a woman saddened and troubled, unable, by reason of that sadness and trouble, to care about keeping her weapons of warfare keen and brightly burnished; or even to feel the wish to wield them, if her using them could cause the severe pain to others she herself suffered. She pitied Villars now, and thought, had she known at the time what he must have felt, how much more tenderly she

would have spoken ! She looked about for him as she thought this, and saw him seated at the farthest end of the table. Their eyes met ; he had been watching her, and warmly as she felt for him, Cecil was almost indignant at this, for it seemed to her as if he could read in her face that she too suffered as he did.

But though she wisely and nobly did not seek a salve for her wounded feelings by making fellow-victims of those around, she could not help her bright beauty being the principal star of attraction to all eyes. She knew and felt it was so, and thought, in the first paroxysm of pain and grief, very bitterly of this gift that could win all but the one she coveted. Not the less for that, however, she forced herself to look gay and bright, to laugh her silvery laugh and smile her sweetest smiles, taking care, at the same time, that none should in that respect think himself more favoured than his neighbour.

It was a long, wearisome day to the poor young Queen. She might have exclaimed with Shakspeare, " Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown ;" for her crown, though formed of roses,

and wreathed for happy hours, had thorns hidden amongst the blossoms, as she now found to her cost. She was so tired when the hour for returning arrived, she would gladly have dispensed with the dance in the evening, but that was not possible. About one thing, however, she was determined, and that was that she would not sit by Villars on the drive home; she knew by experience that he had a quick eye to discern when she was in trouble, and she did not feel disposed to be questioned by him, though it was doubtful whether he would speak to her at all, after what had passed. She therefore told her father she was tired, and went inside with him; to his great astonishment, for he had been thinking, only a few minutes before, how well his darling looked, and how merry she was—evidently enjoying herself as much as it was possible to do. Thus do the very best, kindest, most innocent women often deceive men, who have very little conception of the latent strength of mind and will, on a subject so secret and dear as this, that may lie hidden in a slight fragile body.



The day wore into the night, the dance began, the night wore into another day, and even the dancing at last was over, before Cecil got any rest. Her misery had been very great and real, and she had borne up against it bravely to the end, longing to be alone, that she might weep over her sorrow, and bemoan herself for having lost her friend. But when it was all past, and she laid her weary head on her pillow, though tears gathered on her dark curled lashes, and troubled thoughts flitted through her mind for a minute or two, she was too much exhausted by bodily fatigue, and in too good health and general spirits, for grief to keep her long awake, and in an incredibly short space of time she was calmly asleep; the last thought that flitted through her mind being, "I can remember it all better to-morrow."


Hope, one of the best gifts of God to youthful hearts, whispered to hers, "It will be all right soon. Talk to him, ask him how you have offended him, beg his forgiveness if you have done wrong, and it will be well again; he cannot resist you." With a smile she thought this,

as sleep crept quietly over her, adding mentally: "The next time I get an opportunity I will ask him."

CHAPTER XII.

VILLARS MAKES A DISCOVERY.

WHEN Villars left Cecil after her rejection of him, he roamed off through the grove in a very bitter frame of mind. It had seemed quite impossible to him that anyone could be so blind to her own interests and his good qualities as to refuse him; and he would have felt very confident of success, even had he been addressing some much more high-born and stately damsel than the little lady in question, who really had received no education but what her father could give her, aided by a few masters now and then, and who knew nothing whatever of society, except the Anglo-Indian form, and such experience of more English manners as she had



picked up on hearsay from her brother officers. And then she had encouraged him—at least he thought so ; but she was such a child, after all, perhaps she had spoken the truth when she said, “She was not aware she was drawing him after her.”

He remembered her young, fresh, astonished face when his meaning first dawned on her ; and but for the keen pang of losing her he could have laughed at the recollection. After all, he didn't see that hope was gone yet ; she was too young still to think seriously of love or marriage ; he had been too precipitate. He might have to wait two or three years before he could venture on the subject again, but he was willing to wait ; she was quite worth it, and, in the meantime he would accept the proffered friendship ; it would be better than nothing, and would give him an excuse for hovering about her and haunting her levees—privileges he felt he would not care to lose. It took him some time, and a good deal of angry pacing about, to calm down so far, and come to this resolution ; but once it was formed,

it seemed so good and pleasant to him, and opened hopes of such a nice little reconciliation scene, that he was anxious to put it into execution at once.

They were all seated at dinner, however, when he arrived, and his place being at the opposite end of the table, he was obliged to content himself with stolen glances in her direction, whilst attending, with great apparent devotion, to the lady next him. He saw immediately through her mask of gaiety. Caring for her as he did, it was easy to read the determination to keep up bravely that prompted this forced merriment, but the disturbing cause was more difficult to discover, unless it might be sorrow for the trouble she had caused him, and pain at the harsh words he had spoken to her.

He didn't like to think he had been the cause of the heavy heart that he fancied, and truly, as it happened, she carried under all her light-some outward show ; and had an opportunity offered, he would gladly have effected his reconciliation before their return ; but she, not knowing his changed feelings, avoided him, so that

he found it quite impossible to enter into conversation with her.

Then the drive home, which had seemed to offer him such a favourable occasion, was rendered useless for that purpose by Cecil's change of plan. The dance was the same as the picnic—she avoided him persistently; and thus the day closed without his having been able to do anything towards re-establishing friendly feeling between himself and Cecil.

Perhaps, had he known the whole truth, he would not have cared so much about this promised friendship; and yet, no doubt, after the first pang of pain at finding his hopes must indeed be crushed out, his nature would have been too noble to permit of his adding the trouble he knew she felt on his account to the already weary load she had to bear.

He had it in him to be a good true friend to the girl he loved, even though she might not return his affection; but as yet he knew nothing of the cause of her grief, unless it might concern himself; and on his own account, as

well as hers, he resolved to be the first at the levee next day.

In the meantime, Anstruther, hating himself for his bearish conduct to the poor little Queen, and still unable to control all signs of the tempest that raged within him, watched Cecil move away from him with a kind of relief. He saw he had pained her—that for some reason or other she desired to be very kind to him; but thinking of her as he did, he ascribed her attentions to coquetry, and mentally accused her of not being able to leave a poor invalid like him alone, without wanting to add him to her list of victims.

“Why, lad,” said the Doctor, returning with his dinner, “what’s the matter with you to-day? Indeed I needn’t ask that, for I know it’s too soon for you to have taken such a long tip, and you’re just done up. However, you shouldn’t have been so unkind to that poor child, for all that, as it wasn’t she made you come out so far and tire yourself.”

“I daresay you’re right, Doctor,” he answer-

ed, still crossly. "However, it won't do the Queen any harm to have got my few surly words. Just look how all those fellows are gaping at her, as if they'd never seen a pretty woman before, and sniggering away at every word she says, till it will be a wonder if she don't turn out that most odious of all odious created things, a woman who thinks herself a wit. She gets a great deal too much of that kind of thing, and will soon be quite spoiled."

"I haven't seen any signs of it yet," answered the Doctor, quietly; "and it strikes me, my good friend, that your illness has not improved you mentally or morally. I think, as soon as dinner is over, I will take you home."

"Well really, I daresay it will be the best place for me," replied Anstruther, beginning to feel a little ashamed of himself; not for having judged Cecil hardly (what man ever is, when the one so judged is a woman?), but because he had done so before the good Doctor, who, he saw well, disapproved of it.

Thus Anstruther went home, and did not appear at the dance ; indeed he had symptoms of a relapse into the feverish, excited state that had kept him so long laid up. But he battled through it at last, and was able to get on pretty well when they left Poonah. During all that last week Cecil did not see him again ; and though she would have liked to meet him, and find out in what way she had offended him, yet her hopes being unchecked by seeing his stern grave face as it last met her gaze, she became as light-hearted and happy as she had been before the picnic, and thought the plan arranged for their journey home one of the most delightful possible.

Anstruther, Leveston, Paget, Villars, and Colonel Meredith had determined on going by the Overland Route ; and the time that must elapse between their arrival in England, and that of the troopship, would be spent by Leveston and Cecil in London, where they had no friends whom they could look up and renew acquaintance with.

Meredith also announced to the regiment at

large, one day at mess, about a week before they left Poonah, his intention of selling out as soon as they arrived in England.

When Cecil heard this she was greatly concerned.

"Oh! dear god-papa!" she cried, "we shall miss you so dreadfully: the regiment will never be the same again, once you are gone. Why are you leaving us?"

"I'm getting old, little woman, and tired of moving about. I have a kind of longing to settle down now, in my own place near London. You and Leveston must come down and pay me a visit as soon as I'm settled. My sister, Mrs. Gordon, will live with me; you remember her, Leveston, don't you?"

"What, your pretty sister Nina? Yes, I remember her well. Where's her husband?"

"He died about two years ago. She has no children, and will be very glad to come and settle down with me at Woodpark. It's so near London, I can get into my club every day, and amuse myself just as well as if I was

in town. You'll be greatly pleased with it, Leveston."

But even the idea of paying the Colonel a visit at his pretty suburban place did not reconcile Cecil to the idea of his leaving. They might get a very disagreeable man instead, or they might get some one fully as pleasant as he. It was all the same; she felt sure she should never like anyone as well, and she was almost sure she should dislike the new-comer, whether nice or not, merely because he took her old friend's place.

They were in Bombay at last. The troops were embarking; then they were all on board, and the *Crocodile* set sail. Cecil had wished her friends good-bye for some months to come, except those few who went with her, and she really felt quite dull and downhearted as she remained behind with her father, waiting for their steamer to start. It was not to leave for a day or two longer, which time the gentlemen managed to pass tolerably pleasantly, but which Cecil found very dull. Worse than all, she had never yet succeeded in catching An-

struther alone, and his manner to her was most ceremoniously and oppressively distant.

She was so convinced she had done nothing deserving his displeasure, that she became accustomed to the change in his manner. She decided he must still suffer pain, from the bones broken in his fall, and that to illness, and that alone, his moroseness was to be attributed. She was confirmed in this belief by observing that he hardly ever brightened up, at least in her presence, even when addressing his male companions. Clearly, then, it could not be displeasure with her that produced this alteration in his behaviour.

The day came at last when Cecil was to leave for ever, in all probability, the land where she had lived from childhood. She was fond of it; she knew no other country, and it was a fair one enough, in truth, to merit any affection she might bestow on it. Still she had been accustomed to call the far-off land of England to which she was bound her home, and to think of it as such; so that the tears she shed, as the Indian shore faded fast into the blue of sea

and sky, were quickly dried, and her hopes wore bright visions of the gay life she would lead in her distant northern home.

It is a strange peculiarity of the Anglo-Saxon race, that proneness to regard no place as home except their little island corner of this great world. People who have lived half their lives in some of England's vast colonies, so immensely superior to her in size and natural riches, yet talk of her fondly as home; that home to which they hope to return in their old age, and in which they may lay their bones to rest; whilst others, who never hope to revisit her green shores again, speak of her by the same fond name, and think of her with the same fond feelings. In some cases, even, those born thousands of miles across the ocean, and who perhaps have only the connecting link of parentage with her, call her still their home, and feel no greater pride than in the fact that they can lay claim to the title of Englishman.

During these dull days spent in Bombay, awaiting the sailing of the steamer, Cecil's greatest companion and friend was none other

than Villars, who, true to his intention of making it up with her, had presented himself very early at her levee, on the day after the picnic.

She was rather surprised at his appearance, as may be imagined, and paused for a moment in uncertainty, not knowing how to meet him as he came towards her. He, however, seeing her hesitation, and guessing its cause, exclaimed,

"I have come to ask pardon for my yesterday's offence; won't you forgive me?" at the same time holding out his hand to her.

"Willingly," she answered, giving him hers frankly, and without any tinge of anger or embarrassment. It seemed so natural to her that, on thinking the matter over, he should find himself in the wrong, and, finding himself so, should come to ask pardon, that she felt no surprise, when once he had explained the object of his visit, and not the smallest fear of his renewing the subject that had proved so unwelcome to her before.

"I was very foolish yesterday," he continued, sitting down near her; "and worse than that, I

was rude ; but what I want particularly to atone for, and beg for forgiveness about, is my refusal to accept your friendship. You won't be hard on a fellow, and withhold it now, when he sees his mistake, and would be glad of it. Will you ?”

“No indeed ! I am so glad you value it. Do you know, sometimes I think there are not many do ; at least, I mean, they like me, but for all that, if they got angry with me, and I had offended them in any way, I don't think they care enough about me to come and ask forgiveness, as you have done. Therefore I see your friendship is true, and worth having, and I am glad to get it accordingly.”

“And you will forgive and forget all I said to annoy you ; and it will be all just the same as it was before ?” asked Villars. “I am so glad that is settled ; I had been quite unhappy, as long as we were not on speaking terms.”

Thus Villars and Cecil became greater allies than ever, she carefully avoiding all appearance of caring more for him than for any of the others, and being very cautious not to bestow more

time on him than she did on Ainslie or Borton, or any one else; though she acknowledged often to herself that her chats with him were the pleasantest, and Anstruther's keen jealous eyes quickly discovered that it was so. He could not make out what was going on between this pair; he had certainly overheard some dispute or quarrel between them, in which Villars had used bitter and contemptuous words; yet the next day or two after they were as thick as ever again, and evidently thought very well of each other. He had resolved to punish Villars for his scornful language to the little Queen, who had nevertheless so fallen from her high estate in his eyes; but all ideas of that nature were speedily banished from his mind by reflection, and by this new aspect that affairs had assumed.

In the first place, when he came to think of it, even if matters had remained as he at first had thought, how could he call the young fellow to account without bringing Cecil's name before public notice? and this he was unwilling to do. Now, as matters stood, it would be absurd to

take up the cudgels in her defence, on the ground that Villars had spoken harshly to her, when, as everyone could see for himself, they, at the moment the charge would be made, were the greatest possible friends. He contented himself, therefore, by watching them constantly; torturing himself, no doubt to the last degree, and still unable to detect any glaring, overt act of flirtation or coquetry, in Cecil's intercourse with her young friend.

In truth Cecil's feelings for him were quite those of a sister for a brother. She told him all her little troubles and perplexities, only keeping back her anxieties on the score of Anstruther and his curious behaviour; but Villars, seeing that a shade at times overshadowed her radiant face, and desirous, above all things, to find its cause, soon discovered it was more prone to visit her when her old friend Gerald was present than at any other time. This being once ascertained, little unimportant things, "trifles light as air," led him on in the true scent, till at last he arrived at a conclusion that, if not quite the truth, was certainly not

far from it. It seemed to him that this love of his, on whom he had certainly set his fancy pretty strongly, if not quite his heart, was inclined to think Anstruther's dark, handsome, well-known face more attractive than his new one. He could not say, certainly, that she loved him, but he was quite sure she was prepared to love him, if he by word or deed showed himself capable of being won. And it was just this stolidity of his, and blindness at seeing how the case stood, that filled the subaltern with surprise. He was sure, he told himself, that, were he in Anstruther's place, he would have discovered her feelings long before ; and, having discovered them, he was confident no man could help responding to them, quite forgetting, as he thought thus, "that lookers on see most of the game," and probably that the parties concerned are proverbially slow at finding out how matters stand.

At first a pang of his old folly overcame him when he made this discovery. It seemed so unnatural and improbable to him that another should be preferred before him, that he could

not bring himself to believe it, and when he did believe it, could hardly help accusing her again of coquetry and flirtation, with regard to himself; but when he tried to avoid her, and answered shortly, if she appealed to him, she looked at him with such a plaintive and appealing gaze, saying, "Have I done anything wrong? what has annoyed you? Tell me, and I won't do it again," that he mastered the angry mortified feeling in his heart by a powerful effort, and resolved, for her sake, to do all he could to help her, and smooth a path before her, seeing plainly that the course of her love—if indeed this fancy that he thought he detected amounted to love—would be very hard and difficult where such a man as Anstruther was concerned.

As to Gerald, the young fellow hated him warmly—hated him with a jealous hatred for having won Cecil from him; and hated him more bitterly still because he seemed so contemptuously indifferent to the interest he had excited.

He was not very deeply in love, or he could

not have taken so noble and disinterested a part, some will say, and it may have been true that it was so ; for although the pain at first was keen, and he told himself again and again he was the most miserable wretch alive, and moped for awhile in lonely deserted corners at such times as he could not sit in a nook in Cecil's drawing-room, following her everywhere with greedy regretful eyes, yet, after a short time, he became reconciled to the lot fate had assigned him, and took care of her interests as assiduously then as he had done when hoping to win from her a warmer regard than she had to bestow upon him.

Surely there must have been something much more noble in this young fellow's character than mere outward observers, deceived by his show of foppishness, would have given him credit for. Cecil had discovered it, and, next to her father, Anstruther, and Colonel Meredith, had a higher opinion of him than of anyone else in the regiment. She had a child's unerring judgment in reading character, and from the first day when she had smiled and passed over his rudeness,

guessing from what cause it proceeded, until now when they were about to embark for England, she had seen no cause to alter her first decision. Indeed had she known all that about this time was passing in his heart, she would perhaps have thought she had not valued him half highly enough.

How little Anstruther appreciated all the self-sacrifice and disinterestedness of his junior, could have been seen by anyone understanding the true bearings of the case, had such a one been looking on. As it was, he was too much in love, and too blinded by jealousy and grief, to see how entirely devoid Villars' devotion to the Queen was of any hope of winning a reward. He only saw that they were great friends; and that meant nothing more nor less to him than that Cecil, who he believed had offered herself before to Villars, did not yet despair of success, and was indeed, by perseverance and skill, drawing that foolish golden fish into her net.

It was a base thought for any man to entertain towards the woman he loved; and one

would have fancied that in the mere entertaining it would have cut away the root of all affection out of his heart ; but it was not so ; he was one of those men, and they are many, who, having begun to love one whom they deem good and pure, are endowed with such a fatal power of attaching themselves, that even when the veil is torn from their eyes, and they see the one they adore, foolish and weak, or it may be wicked and worthless, grieve with a bitter and true grief over the shattered earthen image, yet gather up the pieces with care, and clasp them more closely to their hearts than they did when the idol was whole, and passed with them and others for pure and tried gold.

Could Cecil have read his heart, her pride might have come to her rescue, and saved her many a bitter and sorrowful hour ; for child as she was, and dazzled as she had always been by his many taking qualities and his long true friendship, surely she could not have helped seeing which was the worthier of the two hearts presented to her choice. Yet, even had she known how badly he thought of her, she,

womanlike, would doubtless have forgiven it all, for the sake of the strong love he bore her, besides which poor Villars's self-denial looked but very milk and water affection. Women are almost always ready to forgive any bitter or evil fancies against them, if such ideas are caused by the jealousy of a strong turbulent passion. They had rather be badly thought of by one who adores even whilst he slanders, than praised to the skies by one who feels he can live very comfortably without the being he lauds.

Villars did not understand Anstruther's manner, either to himself or to Cecil, at this time. That he was an object of intense dislike to his Captain he saw clearly, and would no doubt have understood it, if he could have had any idea of his senior's affection for the Queen of the Regiment; for though his own love for her was hopeless, he would still have been aware that it was sufficiently devoted, and sufficiently well received, to raise jealous feelings in the heart of any man striving for the same prize. But it was exactly the existence of such a feeling in his senior officer towards Cecil that Vil

lars could not make out. He was surly and sulky to her, not in general perhaps positively rude, but cold and chilling to a degree that would have checked hopes in any nature less bright than that of Cecil. That she still, in spite of all indifference and hardness, felt attracted towards Anstruther, was quite apparent to her younger lover, though to no one else; but indeed it was not surprising it should be so, when he spent hour after hour in studying and watching, trying at times to catch hold of some fragment of hope on which he might build airy enchanted castles, and sometimes seeking, vainly, to discover what it was in his Captain that had so infatuated her, and devising plans by which he could put matters on a better footing between them. Because he saw plainly that if Cecil persisted in fixing her hopes of happiness on this stern morose man, unless some one could discover and smooth away the cause of estrangement between them, her life must be one of disappointment. Reflection and observation showed him clearly that there was a cause for Anstruther's altered manner; for although he

had never met his senior before the accident, he had heard a good deal of him from the others, and they all agreed in saying how altered he had become, and lamenting the change that had taken place in him.

At times he thought the matter over, planning how he would, by questioning Cecil, find out when this change began to make itself felt ; then he would go on to picture himself performing the great and magnanimous act of reconciling his rival to their common love ; but this idea did not seem acceptable, for somehow it always finished abruptly by his exclaiming, "Confound the fellow ! can't he see for himself how matters stand ? I'll do nothing for him, but I will remain friends with our little Queen, and help her as well as I can to get over the troubles that this fancy will bring upon her."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE INDIAN OCEAN.

NOW at last they were tossing over the blue waters of the Indian Ocean, ploughing their way through the sparkling wavelets, with that grand indifference to opposing winds and currents which the power of steam has bestowed upon man. The sun high in the heavens beat down fiercely on the palpitating bosom of ocean, and on the dark speck on its surface, containing so many human lives, burdened with all the hopes and fears, the pains and pleasures, that human souls carry with them. There was shade, though not much coolness, under the awning on the quarter-deck, and there most of the passengers were collected that

bright sunny morning. They had not yet begun to fraternise, it only being the second day since they set out; and indeed a very large portion of the human freight was still labouring under that most distressing of all the ills that flesh is heir to—namely, sea-sickness.

Cecil had been a little knocked up by it at first, but it passed off quickly; and there she was, looking as blooming as ever, and seated in a comfortable nook near the stern of the vessel, quite alone. Not very far from her, Anstruther and one of the passengers had entered into conversation. She watched them carelessly, now and then thinking how much her friend's face had changed since his illness; what a cold, stern, clever face it was now, and how completely its old sunny genial expression had departed; also she noticed lines on his brow, and a set drawn look about the mouth, that she fancied had never been there before. Whilst thinking thus, she came to the determination to speak to him at once, if she could possibly secure an opportunity, and find out what was the matter with him.

The two men stood and talked for some time. At last the stranger left, and Anstruther remained leaning over the side, gazing at the water moodily. The girl watched him with a kind of fear. There was no interest in his look as he followed the course of the wavelets with vacant dull gaze, no softer expression stole over his face when the sunbeams crept under the awning, as the vessel dipped and rose, and touched him now on the cheek, now on the brow, now over all the head and face, with their soft caressing glow. It was all the same to him, the beauty of nature eliciting as little response from his troubled mind as human friendship had been able to do. She made a movement at last, with the intention of rising and going up to speak to him, but seeing her stir, he shook himself out of his weary attitude, and hastening to her, he asked if there was anything he could get her.

"No," she answered timidly for her, and with a strange fear of being refused, quite new to the gay Queen, who was used to have her re-

quests granted before they were asked. "I only wanted you to sit here, and talk to me a little. I am so dull by myself, and the others are all off in different parts of the vessel. Poor Villars is ill too," she added.

It was an unfortunate speech to make, that last about Villars; and Anstruther, standing beside her, still looking down on her, even more coldly than had been his wont of late, answered,

"It is indeed a pity your friend Villars should be ill; it deprives you of such a delightful intellectual companion. I should make so poor a substitute for him, that I really cannot offer myself in his place; the mental comparisons you would make between us would not be in my favour."

She looked up at him in astonishment.

"How can you say so?" she replied. "You are always my old friend Gerald, the first and best I ever had; I cannot forget that, and though I may like many others very much, and Villars I do like particularly, yet none of them can be the same to me as you, and never

will be. Do sit down and talk to me a little, it is so long since we have had a chat together; not since the day you were hurt," she went on, seeing reluctance in his look, and resolved to allude to that adventure as a last and final appeal.

It had the desired effect. As he remembered the occasion to which she referred, and thought how boldly she had ventured her own safety for his, more gentle feelings came over him, and he resolved for this once, even if never again, he would sit beside her and listen to her merry talk, that had such a charm for him, and which he had so long denied himself. As he sat down, Cecil felt that on that point at least she had gained the victory, and encouraged thereby, she went on boldly—

"What is the matter with you, Gerald, lately? You are so changed to me, and, indeed, I think to everyone. A short time ago I should not have had to beg you so hard to come and talk to me."

She looked at him half saucily, half tenderly. She was as yet partly a child, partly a

woman, but her question and look roused again all the evil suspicions he entertained of her. He thought that in Villars's absence she was trying her coquetries on him, keeping her hand in, in fact, and it was with a burning sense of indignation that he answered,

"I have avoided you, because I was annoyed and grieved to see you falling into such bad and dangerous ways as you have taken up lately. Habits that will ensure you the reprobation of all right-thinking minds, though they may win the applause of a few conceited fools."

"I know," she answered, with a hot flush in her cheeks, "whom you allude to by the epithet of a conceited fool; and I will say, in his defence, he not being here to defend himself, and being also a friend of mine, that, though he may be conceited, he is no fool, but a good and true man. As to what you mean by my having taken up bad and dangerous ways, I am quite at a loss to understand you. Indeed, Anstruther," she went on earnestly, "I wish you would explain what you mean, as I think you

must have made some mistake when you accuse me of such dreadful things."

"I can understand your championing your friend very well," replied Anstruther; "as I know your intentions with regard to him—or rather I can't understand your championing him, as he refused to marry you when you wanted him to do so; but how you can deny that such conduct on your part was bad and dangerous, passes my comprehension.

As she listened to him the girl's eyes dilated with horror and fear. "He is surely mad," she thought; "the fall must have injured his brain, though the doctor didn't say so." Then she added aloud, half fearing to speak, in case she might, by so doing, irritate him into active violence—

"How can you say or believe such a thing of me, as that I asked Villars to marry me, and he refused? Really," she went on, laughing, in spite of her fright, at the absurdity of the notion as applied to her, "you must know that ladies never do that."

"So I had always thought before," he an-

swered with a cold sneer that convinced Cecil the man who uttered it was no lunatic; though whether he wickedly slandered her with design, or had been in some wonderful way deluded, she could not make out.

She would have liked to tell him that he had mistaken the case altogether—that it was Villars who had proposed and she who had refused him; and perhaps had she done so, he would have seen the mistake that had been made, and acknowledged his error; but the poor little Queen had a certain code of honour, which had been inculcated by her father since her early childhood, and, judged by that standard, it seemed to her a mean thing to betray the confidence a man necessarily reposes in the woman he asks to be his wife, merely with a view to clearing herself from an unjust accusation; yet she saw plainly that it was some garbled version of her interview with Villars on the day of the picnic he had got hold of, though how he could have brought himself to believe it she was unable to imagine.

She paused a moment, wondering what she

would say to disabuse this man of the idea he had taken into his head, and very much puzzled to account for his sudden prejudice against her, which made stories relating to her seem quite worthy of credit, that a short time ago he would have scouted as utterly impossible. He watched her gloomily, saying to himself, "She cannot deny it boldly, as I almost feared she might have done. Perhaps she knows she was overheard ; at any rate, it shows she has still some respect for the truth, no matter how hardened to evil she may have become in other respects." Then as he saw the shadows of grave perplexed thought pass over her earnest face, he continued, "Can she be framing some plausible tale to deceive me, and explain away my suspicions ? It looks like it, but knowing her to be as false as she is fair, I will be on my guard ; she shall not blind me."

Suddenly she turned to him, looking full at him with her saddened pleading eyes, as she answered,

"You cannot think the accusation you bring against me true ; you must know your taunt is

not just. If I am not as perfect a lady as the English girls of whom I have heard so much, surely I am at least enough so to be above the imputation you would cast on me. Tell me what makes you think so badly of me; how have I ever shown myself worthy of your suspicions?"

"My suspicions, as you call them, are certainties; I know that what I affirm is true, and you cannot wonder that, seeing you as you are, I should turn with disgust from the flimsy veil of childish frankness you delight to throw over your coqueties, and which deceive those who have not been enlightened as I."

Poor child! she listened to him breathlessly, feeling a dull despair creep over her as she heard his cruel words. He said he knew what he affirmed was true, and yet she felt the consciousness of innocence, and could remember not one act of hers that would give any man the right to speak of her, and to her, as he had done. Her courage gave way under this sudden and overwhelming blow; any harshness she could have borne, but that he should despise her, and look

with contempt on every act of her innocent gay life, was more than she could endure. Tears rose to her eyes, but did not fall—pride and pain burnt them up; but she stretched out her hands in piteous appeal to him, saying,

“You are mistaken, Gerald, indeed you are. I have never done that of which you accuse me. Ask Villars if what you say is true?”

“Ask your accomplice and partner,” he replied bitterly: “for though I know he didn’t think much of you at the time, you have made it up since, as all the world can see. No, indeed, I am not such a fool, thank you; and at least wouldn’t care for his word, when I have lost my faith in yours.”

“You used to believe me, I know, once,” she answered: “won’t you do so now, when I tell you solemnly you have made some mistake in this. Do tell me how you came to think so; perhaps I can explain it.”

“Your explanations would do no good,” he answered sternly. “Oh! little Queen,” he went on with a burst of irrepressible passion, “don’t you know, don’t you feel, that if it had been

possible to believe you, if my own ears had not borne witness to your falsehood, nothing else in heaven or earth would have convinced me of it ! Don't you know I have loved you, and love you still, as a man only loves once in his life, thinking you good, and sweet, and true as the angels above us, and finding you, heaven help me ! but a fallen spirit at last, laden with the imperfections and sins of our lower earth, though wearing the form of a brighter, happier sphere. And now that you have fallen, how shall I plant my faith again in you, though I still love on, where I fain would despise. It is over with me—all trust, all honour towards you, though your presence still has power to stir my pulses, and make my heart leap with a rapture that is keen with the agony of pain, and very little sweet ; because I know that, if I chose, I might gain you for my own."

"Oh ! Gerald," she answered softly, yet half smiling, for his avowal made her very happy, thinking, now she was sure he loved her, she would soon overcome his scruples ; "that is not love such as you describe, or you would think

my word always true, before any testimony, even of your own senses, against it. Do you imagine I would believe wrong of you, though I heard or saw you do it? Surely not, if you denied it; I would sooner believe all the world, even myself, false, than your word untrue. Can you not have a little faith too? Tell me what you heard, and let me explain it. You would believe me, would you not?" She leant towards him, resting her hand on his arm, but he shook her off fiercely.

"It would be torturing me to no purpose," he answered; "you have drawn from me what I should never have told you, but don't think to take advantage of it. Miserably weak I am in my love for you, weaker still because I cannot tear myself away from the circle of your fascinations; but no explanations can make plain words bear anything but a plain meaning, and I will not lead you into the deeper sin of inventing false excuses, to delude one whom you think credulous enough to believe you."

"How hard you are!" she moaned. "You have

told me you love me, and I may now tell you I love you—in fact, you know it as well as I: and yet you cannot have faith in me to believe that some half-heard sentence has deceived you. Do you think,” she went on proudly, “that I would take your love, if bought by a deception? If you had offered it to me freely and fully, and I had been conscious of some hidden fault that might have made you regret your offer, you should have known it first, how much more would I not tell you the truth when you ask for it.”

“We have said enough about it,” he replied. “I would hear none accuse you of a shadow of wrong-doing, though I know it to be true; but though I will guard your good name from the breath of slander, even if I believed the reports to be founded on truth, I can never pay you the old devotion, the old respect, that left my heart for ever when I knew you as you were. Oh! Cecil,” he went on, “why have you treated me thus? I could be happy if I were still ignorant. Why did you save me that day from the wild boar’s tusks, only to open up to me a life of

misery, more cruel than the death from which you delivered me."

Her tears were falling slowly now from her drooping eyelids, as she answered, "Say no more, Captain Anstruther; you shall never again hear a prayer for love or justice from me. You regret the life you say I gave you that day; I regret I have lived to hear you say so. So great a gift so lightly valued is a rare and bitter sight, and I shall never forget that I have been miserable enough to cause such ingratitude. From this time we shall be the merest acquaintances; but remember, if ever you are in trouble and in need of some friendly, steadfast heart, to believe in your word and honour when others doubt them, you will ever find one in me, though you wouldn't credit mine."

She rose and left him, walking forward to her own room with a stately step and air that were very strange and new to her. There she shut herself in, and sat down on the floor, her head drooped forward into her lap, and bitter tears of slighted love and pride rising to her eyes.

But she couldn't weep, as she would have

wept for a far slighter cause a week or two ago ; her heart was too sore for that. It was not alone that she loved and her love was vain, for that she could have wept and bemoaned herself as wildly as any untamed heart of her own age ever did, but her affection had been thrown back to her with scorn and slighting contemptuous words ; it had been sneered at by the man she loved, and she felt that nothing else in life had a bitterness equal to that.

Should she sit down and weep for one who treated her thus ? No, indeed ; she was weak, and fond, and foolish, because she knew if he said one kind word to her she would forget and forgive all, and love him still ; but she was not so miserably devoid of all natural pride as to let him see how deeply she had been wounded. Besides, how unaccountable it all was ! She could not imagine how he could have taken up so false a story ; for if he had heard, as he said, then he must have heard something very contrary to the truth. It was too shameful that he should believe her capable of anything so unwomanly. She almost hated him as she

thought it all over ; but, at the mere idea of hating him, her whole spirit turned to him again, and in the end she wept long and bitterly. It did her good, that passionate burst of tears, though she did not give way long. There was a great deal of strength in this unformed childish character ; therefore, in a short time she rose, dashing away her tears angrily. "What's the good of crying about it?" she thought; "it will never be any better, and it cannot be any worse. He wished I had not saved him from the wild boar ; after that I can never hope any more—he must have believed badly of me when he said that. However, I mustn't let anyone see I have been crying. What shall I do ? Villars will be sure to find out something is the matter, if he is up now, and will be asking me about it. He is the only real friend I have," she went on, beginning to cry again, and then stopping herself. "I won't think about it any more, or I shall go on making a baby of myself." And she at once set vigorously to work, smoothing her tossed hair, setting her little room to rights, and bathing

her red eyes with *eau-de-cologne* and water.

In the meantime, Anstruther watched her walk away, half sorry, half pleased, that he had at last finished this painful interview. He would have been glad if their friendship had not been so completely broken off; it tormented him to think that, having one less companion among her old friends on board, she must of necessity be driven; either to seek new acquaintances, or to enter into a closer intimacy with Villars than she had yet done; and he could very well guess which of the two courses would be the one she was most likely to pursue.

For though, of course, a person in a troubled and sore state of mind, as he could not help acknowledging she was, would naturally turn for comfort and consolation to old friends rather than new, yet now he felt instinctively that his remarks on his junior officer were so closely connected with his disapprobation of her conduct, that, in defence of the latter, she would perforce continue her relations with the former, even more markedly than before.

After a little, as his mind became calmer, and the tempest of passionate and tender feelings called up by his avowal, and her clearly spoken though slighted response to it, subsided, he began to wonder whether, after all, he had not been wrong in refusing to hear her explanations. He had put the interpretation on her words suggested by Mrs. Brown, and it was quite possible that even if the general meaning was the same, there might be extenuating circumstances. Now he had no chance of discovering such, if there were any, and must take the usual punishment of having acted on a passionate impulse, that of being constantly tormented henceforth with doubts as to the wisdom of the course he had pursued.

He would not seek an interview with her again, and ask for the explanation he had at first refused. Many reasons conspired to make him reject this plan, and perhaps the most powerful was his own nature, which made him very averse to humbling himself by owning to a woman that he had been in the wrong,

even though that woman was the one he loved. Then he had suffered so much whilst talking with her—both pain on his own account, at being forced to raise a barrier between himself and the happiness he coveted, and pain at witnessing the misery he acknowledged his words inflicted on her. She was not very demonstrative in the expression of the deep feelings of the heart, though in times of gaiety or merriment she gave free vent to her delight; but her sweet childish face had, on this occasion, shown to him very plainly that it was only her pride, wounded, as it was, by his scornful words, that kept her up.

Besides, he could not bear to think of her suffering through him; he could speak very harsh and cutting words to her under the influence of passion, but could not help censuring himself for them, and grieving deeply over them, when the angry impulse had passed away.

Villars was up, and looking very well too, considering, as he informed Miss Cecil when they

met at lunch, that he had been nearly dying during the night; but though she tried to get up a laugh at him, her heart was so heavy that his keen ear and eye soon detected something had occurred, whilst he was ill, to torment his liege lady. A glance at Anstruther's dark face told him little, but he very soon observed Cecil's timid, half frightened glances at the Captain, which confirmed him in his idea that some conversation had passed between them.

"Hard-hearted brute!" he muttered between his teeth: "shouldn't I like to pitch him overboard."

"What are you saying?" inquired Cecil, listlessly. "Did you speak to me?"

"I was saying Captain Anstruther was a hard-hearted brute, to keep all the pickles there by his elbow and not offer you any. I shall have to teach him manners if he doesn't look out. Hullo! I say, Anstruther, pass the pickles over here; Miss Cecil is waiting for them."

Anstruther passed them with a stiff, annoyed look; he thought they had been talking of him,

or at any rate that Cecil must have shown some displeasure with him that other eyes could read, to allow of Villars speaking in such a fault-finding though joking tone of him before her.

As for Cecil, she coloured furiously and said,

"Indeed, I didn't want them, Villars. I wish you hadn't said that; Captain Anstruther will think I was complaining of him for not attending to me."

"Oh! never mind if he does," answered the kind-hearted young fellow, thinking he might, perhaps, laugh her out of her fancy for this disagreeable sour-tempered young man, if he could not win her from him by other means. And perhaps in this he was right, for ridicule often succeeds where all other means fail. "He's as surly as a bear, and I should dearly like to rile him a little, just to see if he'd show fight."

"Oh! don't, please don't!" answered Cecil in alarm; "it might create some unpleasantness that would last for the whole voyage."

Leave him alone, and let us take a turn on deck."

And there Anstruther saw them when he went up afterwards.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STORM AT SEA.

AFTER this attempted explanation and its results, Cecil studiously avoided Anstruther, without appearing to do so. She never let her father remark any difference in her manner towards his friend. Indeed he was not an observant man, and the change would have required to be very marked for him to take notice of it. But one thing he did observe, and that was her great intimacy with Villars.

"That young fellow and you are inseparables, Cecil," he said one day, when they had been walking up and down the quarter-deck for an hour. "What is there about him pleases you so much?"

"He is so kind-hearted and good-natured,

papa dear—always the same, which is more than one can say for some older friends,” she added with a sigh, thinking of the man she loved, who had treated her so unworthily.

He smiled and looked at her, as he answered—

“Don’t talk that way, darling. It sounds as if you had tried the world and found it hollow, though to you at least it has never been so. I hope it will be long before you can say so from experience.”

“That’s all you know about it, papa,” she replied, with a saucy gay look, while her heart ached as she did so; and running away laughing, she shut herself up in her cabin, beginning to work with a kind of savage determination, saying to herself as she did so, “How little he knows! Poor papa! it would grieve him if he were to think his friend had spoken to me as he has.”

It was quite true, as Captain Leveston had said, Cecil and Villars were inseparable, but then she had no other old friends on board, except Anstruther and the Colonel. With the one

to whom she would so gladly have turned for companionship she had now nothing in common ; and her dear old god-papa, though delighting in a constitutional with her at stated times, yet spent a good portion of every day in prosing away with his old crony, her father. Neither of the two young people objected to being thrown so much together, however ; many young fellows on board would have been delighted if they could have been on similar terms with her, and made overtures towards such an intimacy ; but she, though always perfectly courteous and friendly, yet maintained a kind of reserve to them which effectually prevented their overstepping the boundary that separates acquaintance from friendship.

Villars used to laugh quietly to himself sometimes at the cool manner in which the little Queen passed over and ignored some of their most vigorous efforts to establish friendly relations. It is always peculiarly pleasant to feel oneself *au mieux* with a person for whose favour every one around you is striving ; and the young cornet was just the man to appreciate his position

to the fullest extent. Then, though he knew more fully day by day, from the very nature and manner of their intercourse, that it was simply friendship, and never love that she felt for him, yet, counting on her rupture with Anstruther, and beguiled by the charm of their intimacy, he found himself perpetually building castles of which Cecil was the mistress, and which something always occurred to overthrow as soon as they were built.

How pleasant those hot calm days were on the Indian Ocean ! How quietly they ploughed their way over the glassy water ; for the weather was exceptionally fine, and not a ripple ruffled the surface of the "Summer sea." They laughed together sometimes, as they thought of their friends on board the troop-ship, becalmed perhaps by the same windless sky that was so pleasant to them.

• "How they must be raging at the delay !" Villars would say ; "I am glad I am not lounging about the *Crocodile* with them."

They were leaning over the side one afternoon, talking about such little objects of in-

terest as came under their notice, when the captain and first mate passed them in close consultation. The day was very close and sultry, the sun had blazed all the morning out of a leaden, heavy sky, lightened round the horizon by a dull, copper-coloured band. Now, however, the sun began to have a misty, sickly look, and out of the southern horizon a mass of cloud seemed to creep stealthily forward, climbing gradually up towards the zenith at the same time. The Queen of the Regiment and her companion had not as yet noticed it, but seeing the captain and mate led to some remark on them, and looking at the objects of their conversation, they found them anxiously glancing out to southwards.

“We shall have a dirty night, depend upon it, Mr. Nixon,” the captain was saying. “See that everything is got ready, whilst I run down to look at the glass.”

“Not much need to do that, sir,” answered the mate; “that sky tells its own tale, and we’re in for something this time, or I am much mistaken.”

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Cecil and Villars looked first at each other, then at the black mass of cloud, that, creeping upward and onward, had already obscured the sun. It had grown very dark, and a cool feeling came stealing over the sea. The cold air seemed to come, as it were, from under the enormous inky mass, that was fringed, where it touched the water, with a dull white haze.

Just then Captain Leveston came up to them.

"You had better go below, Cecil," he said. "We are going to have a bad night of it, and the ladies are better in their cabins. We shall all have to help, I suppose, if anything is wanted."

"Oh! papa, please let me stay on deck a little longer. I don't feel frightened—at least, not very," she added, glancing with a shudder at the cloud which had now approached nearer, and seeing in that look that the white haze at its base was caused by the foam-lashed water as it felt the influence of the storm. "I should be much more uneasy below."

Whilst she was speaking they had been overshadowed by a darkness that might be felt,

so heavy and appalling was it. Then, almost before her sentence finished, the heavens seemed rent asunder by a flash of lightning so prolonged, so vivid, so dreadful, that Cecil, accustomed as she was to the fearful storms of the East, could hardly suppress a cry of terror, and went on nervously, "I will go down if you like, papa. I think perhaps it would be best."

Her words were lost in the crash that accompanied the peal, and that deafened all around; but her motion towards the cabins was seen and understood by her father, who led her, half blinded and quite terror-struck, below. Down in the saloon everything was in a state of confusion—ladies who had not been aware of the approach of the storm until the darkness warned them that something unusual was happening, were running to ask what was the matter. One, in particular, who was troubled with nerves, was in violent hysterics, though, after all, she was not to be wondered at, so terrible was the incessant noise of the thunder, so awful the constant glare of the lightning, every one's face assuming a livid tint under its powerful blaze.

Children were crying at the uproar, and increasing it tenfold with their shrill treble voices; mammas and maids were scolding; and the trampling of feet was heard overhead. Almost before Cecil had time to notice all this, and think what she had better do, the vessel gave a pitch forward, quivering like a frightened horse, and lurched to the port side, tossing every one, unprepared as they were for anything of the kind, pell-mell in a struggling heap to that side of the cabin. For a few seconds, that seemed an interminable age to all these people shut up below, expecting death every instant, the ship lay motionless, the only sound that could be heard, rising above and deadening all other noises, being the wild shriek of the wind and the dash of foaming water. Then the good ship righted herself again, and bounded upward, throwing the still struggling mass of women and children to the other end of the saloon; but at last every one caught hold of some object of support, and a kind of order was established. Between the plunges of the vessel, Cecil dragged herself onward, from one piece of

furniture to another, till she got into her own room, and seated herself there on the floor to await her fate.

How long she remained thus she did not know. Her heart was too full of fear, and a hundred other conflicting feelings, for her to be able to keep any account of time; but after what appeared to her an age, a knock was heard at her door. She moved towards it as well as she could whilst the vessel rolled so fearfully, and opening it, almost started back in surprise at seeing Anstruther there before her. He thought she was falling, from the motion of the vessel, and put his arm round her to support her. How her heart beat then! She was sure they were doomed; all hope must be gone, and he had come to say farewell to her before they died. She would have liked to lay her head on his shoulder, and tell him she forgave all his cruel suspicions, all his harsh conduct, and that she was content to die, knowing that he at last believed her; but as yet he had not spoken, and she must wait and hear what he had to say first.

"Your father is helping at the pumps, Cecil, just now," he began. "We have sprung a leak, the engine fires have been put out, and though a sail has been hoisted, it is very doubtful if we can live out the night. He asked me to come down and tell you this, as I have just finished my spell of work, and shall not be called on again for an hour or two. He also asked me, if he could not get near you, in case of our going down, to do what I could to save you. Oh, Cecil, darling!" he went on passionately, "if he knew how needless those words were to me. My only comfort, when I think of the fate, I fear, is before you, is that at least in death you will be near me, though in life we were so far separated. Cecil, love, tell me that you forgive the cruel words I said to you the other day in my jealous rage."

"I forgive you," she answered simply, looking up in his face with the fullest affection and trust in her glance. "You will never doubt me again, will you?" she added, thinking that this prayer for forgiveness included also an acknowledgment of the falseness of his suspicions.

"We will not talk of that," he replied hurriedly. "I have found out that it is enough for me that I love you, that I cannot live without you, and so you will have me now, it matters nothing to me what you may have done in the past."

"Oh! Gerald," she cried, with distress, "are you then so hard that here, in the presence of death, you cannot see how you have wronged me; that you love me, and cannot believe in my truth? Have nothing to say to me; leave me for ever, if you will not take my word. It were better, far better for both of us, we were dead, or should die—together at least, and in death united, than you should marry one in whose honour you have no faith."

"What is the good of faith or trust?" he answered bitterly. "I have none in anything since I lost it in you. All I desire now is to have you on any terms, and leave ideal virtues for those who can still believe in them."

"Why, then, have you come here to torture and try me?" she replied. "Do you not see that on those terms I can never be yours? We

must fall back on the cold acquaintanceship of the past few weeks; for I will not consent, neither would my father, if he knew it, allow me, to marry one who holds me as lightly as you. 'Trust me all in all or not at all,' is what I ask and desire of you; try it, and you shall have no cause to repent."

"You are hard on me now," he murmured. "You would have me either profess a faith I don't feel, and which I cannot make myself feel, or else, if I fail in doing this, you would shut me out from all the brightness and joy of life; I may tell you I believe in you, if I can bring my tongue to speak a lie to you; but sooner or later, in every little word, act, deed, and gesture, you would find that I had deceived you; then perhaps you would feel towards me as I now do towards you."

"You misunderstand me," she answered sadly, "if you think I require you to sully your soul by falsehood. I would have you noble and true always in my eyes, as you are now, though so harsh and cruel; but because you are upright yourself, I would have you believe, even

against appearances, that others may be so too."

"But I am not so," he replied bitterly. "Do you think it noble to ask all from you, when I give you nothing in return. Is it true either to myself or to you to smother my conscience, and seek your love, whilst I condemn your character. No, I am nothing better than I think you in so doing; but I cannot help myself—you are stronger than honour and principle."

Cecil raised her head from his shoulder, where she had rested it, and was about to withdraw from his protecting arm, when a terrific crash was heard, and the vessel again rolled on its side, lying for some time almost motionless, whilst the rush of the water as it swept over the deck, the trampling of many feet, and the hoarse sounds of human voices, raised in tones of command, could be heard above the whistling of the wind and the roar of the thunder.

"I must leave you," cried Anstruther hurriedly, "to find out what this new calamity is. You shall see me again presently, but I can stay no longer with you. I must work too, only I will

be near you, and if the hand of man can do anything, count on mine."

He tore himself from her, and rushed on deck. The cause of the uproar they had heard was immediately apparent. One of the masts had been struck by lightning, and gone over the side; part of it still blazed, thus threatening to add the horrors of fire to the already dreadful terrors of the storm. Taking in the state of the case at one glance, Anstruther hurried back to Cecil, whom he found lying where he had left her, and almost insensible. Hurriedly he told her what had happened, adding that the fire was rapidly being got under, and he must be off to work. As he spoke he raised her and seated her on a sofa screwed into the wall; and was turning to leave when she held him back, crying faintly, "If we live over this, Gerald, let us be friends—better friends than we have been in the past. All cannot be as you wish till you know me better; but if we remain friendly, you will learn in time that the evil you have thought of me could never have entered my heart."

“It shall be as you wish, if heaven spares us,” he answered; and kissing her as one that sees all he loves for the last time, he hurried off.

CHAPTER XV.

IN LONDON AT LAST.

AFTER that last and fearful crash the storm abated by degrees, till at length it became evident, even to the most timid on board, that they had escaped the danger, and might now look forward once more to reaching the distant English shore. For during that fearful night, even the boldest and bravest could only nerve their minds to meet the death that appeared inevitable, and had no hope that the dawn of another day should ever again see them sailing in safety over the tempest-tossed ocean. But so it was; the hurricane swept on its course, the leak was stopped, the fire extinguished, the broken mast cut away, the

engine-room fire relighted, and once more gallantly ploughing her way through the green foam-crested billows, the vessel steamed on her course to Aden. When all the turmoil and agitation was over, Cecil's thoughts turned most naturally to her conversation with Anstruther the night before. She could not look back on it with a feeling of satisfaction. It had terminated in a way that did not place her in the position she felt she ought to occupy with regard to the man she loved, and still less had it tended to raise him in her opinion, if any act or word of his now could influence her mind on that matter. But such was not the case. No matter how he regarded her, no matter how grievously he might have mistaken her character, how prejudiced his judgment in respect to her might have become, he was still, she thought, the best and noblest of mankind, incapable of a mean or unworthy action, and if stern and unforgiving to her, gentle and true to all others. His conduct towards her did not for one minute open her eyes to the fact that he was not as perfect as she supposed him. She excused him

to herself, saying, "He thinks he saw and heard me; there is some mistake, and he is no doubt right to believe the evidence of his senses against me, only I wouldn't do so to him."

Besides this, the new treaty of friendship that had been entered into between them was one that must be more trying and painful at times than their former estrangement. She had an idea that he would not long allow matters to remain upon that footing without pressing for a final arrangement, which, to her, would be impossible, in the manner he wished, as long as his suspicions of her conduct were not removed and explained. She could not, she told herself, even for the love she bore him, consent to marry him, whilst he held her beneath trust and honour; and she could not understand the frame of mind that would consent to take her whilst so tarnished in his eyes. There must, therefore, be constant allusions to this subject, she feared; and all such allusions, unless they cleared up the mystery, would only widen the breach between them. However, if he would but consent to take her friendship for the present, desiring

nothing more till he had tried and proved her, she would certainly be the happier for the change, though at times she might suffer pain, feeling his mistrust and doubt with regard to her.

He, in the meantime, when he could pause from his labour and think the matter over, looked at it with a triumphant feeling, as a kind of victory gained. One thing he knew now for certain, or at least with as much certainty as anyone can feel in a matter where a woman's faith is concerned; and that was that she loved him—not Villars or another. Whatever her intimacy with Villars might mean, it did not arise from affection—at least not from such as she felt for him, and as he desired to obtain from her. It might be friendship only; and he would willingly have believed it such, but for the inexplicable words he had overheard, and whose true interpretation he was sure he understood. At any rate, even if they had at that time borne such a meaning, they would never be repeated again, as he could not doubt the avowal she had uttered in the hour of danger; and, be-

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sides, he felt that their renewed intercourse was a great concession from a spirit so proud as hers, which, even while conscious of guilt, and knowing its guilt discovered, wore so bold a front as, at times, to make him almost believe her innocent. Yes, he had gained a step, and now he would wait a while patiently. Knowing she preferred him in her heart to all the others, it was more easy to do so. He would not alarm her, or excite another attempt at explanation by pressing his suit, until his former suspicious, cruel behaviour should have passed from her mind ; "and perhaps by that time," he added, "I shall myself have learnt to trust in her, as I did before, and as she desires I should do still."

Villars soon became aware, by their friendly manner towards each other, that some reconciliation had been effected. Cecil was so gentle, yet gay, so happy, so sweet, that even a less experienced eye than his could have seen she loved, and was satisfied with her love. His case, he knew, was hopeless; but though he had always told himself so, the conviction seemed

to come on him now with a more cruel, overwhelming force than he could have thought himself capable of feeling after so long a period of doubtful watching for the coming trial. He would fain have hidden himself out of sight for a day or two, till the bitterness of his disappointment had a little passed. But this was not possible, so he only moped about in corners, leaning listlessly over the side, watching the green rollers that had lost all power to please his sight, when he could not admire them with her; and for some days he hardly exchanged a word with her, whose image constantly occupied his mind. And she, to her shame be it spoken—though, indeed, it was very natural—never thought of him, or why he kept away from her.

When the first awkwardness of meeting Anstruther on simple, friendly terms, after their last passionate interview, had passed away, she had yielded herself up entirely to the delight of their intercourse, and thought of nothing but him she loved, and how to make herself pleasing in his eyes. True, whenever she did meet Villars or anyone else, she had a bright

smile and a merry word for them, given out of the fulness of a loving and happy heart, simply because, in her present state of mind, she could not have spoken or acted otherwise, and not because she ever bestowed one minute's serious consideration on those about her.

From all ages it has been observed that nothing is so selfish as love, and it is to be feared the accusation is true. Cecil was as little so, in general, as it was possible for anyone who had lived a totally unclouded life to be; but she now yielded to it quite as much as though it had always been her distinguishing characteristic.

The trouble that hung over her in Anstruther's shaken faith had no power to dim her happiness, as long as it was kept out of sight, and her horizon always seemed too bright and sunlit for her to perceive that that of others might be dark and cloudy.

Therefore she never noticed Villars's sudden withdrawal from her company, nor the change that had fallen over his lightsome spirit, until little by little, as the first shock wore away, his

still young and vigorous nature began to discover there might be many other things in life worth living for besides the bright winning smile of a lovely face. Even perhaps he dimly saw, through the veil of the future, there might be some other being possessed of as enchanting grace, as winsome beauty as hers; but this as yet, his heart would have considered as treason to think of boldly, only, he began to shake off the brooding melancholy that had overspread him, and sought her company as of old, whenever he could do so without disturbing her new intimacy with Anstruther.

Thus, by the time they arrived in England, any ordinary observer would have seen no perceptible change in their intercourse from what it had been before they left India; and her brother officers, had they appeared on the scene, far from suspecting how matters really stood, would have imagined that her old childish friendship for Anstruther, broken for a time after his accident, had been resumed on its old footing. It was only strangers who might have discovered the secret, for their eyes would not be blinded

by long acquaintance; but even they, unless specially observant, would have found it almost impossible to detect any difference between her manner to other old friends and to Anstruther.

As for Captain Leveston, he knew and saw nothing of all this. Fond as he was of his daughter, and loving him as she did, he neither guessed her griefs and troubles, nor did she tell him of them. "It would only distress him," she argued, "if he thought me unhappy. It is much better I should bear my own burden alone, than let it throw a gloom over his life, which has never been very bright, I know."

She told herself this when her sorrow was heaviest, keeping up the appearance of a gaiety she did not feel, whenever he was by. And then when matters looked happier for her, and she began to flatter herself with hopes of a loving and lovely future, it was still too sweet, too precious a secret to be disclosed to any one, hardly even to her own heart, for fear a breath passing over it should blow it away. Thus time wore on. They landed in England, and the whole

party separated in various directions. Meredith went to his little place, Woodpark, telling Leveston before he left that the promised visit must be paid ; and ere long his name appeared in the Gazette, as having retired from the service by the sale of his commission. The man who succeeded him as Colonel of the —th Dragoons was as yet unknown personally to any of the Regiment. Houston was his name, and Paget had heard he was a good sort of fellow enough, but unbending and determined in anything upon which he set his mind.

Villars's people were in town ; his sister going through her first season. The gay cornet did not object to accompanying her in her round of gaiety, he having not yet adopted the *blasé* tone of a London man of fashion, which he afterwards decided was the most killing and effective style in ladies' society. Cecil and her father had taken lodgings in town, for the purpose of doing all the sights, and passing the time until the arrival of the *Crocodile*. At first it was lonely, so the gay young Queen thought, as Anstruther had been obliged to

leave them, to visit his relations, telling them, however, he should return before long, and await the arrival of the troop-ship somewhere in their neighbourhood. Cecil understood that arrangement very well, though her father thought it curious that a man like Anstruther, who had seen none of his friends since his last leave, about three years ago, should care to spend so little time with them now.

She did not long find it lonely, however, for before many days passed Villars brought his sister and mother to call on her; and from that time forth showers of invitations poured in, which she, who had never entered any English fashionable society, and who had every capability in her for enjoying it, was, after a little persuasion from her new friends, delighted to accept. Mrs. Villars acted as chaperon to her, Leveston being quite unequal to the task; and thus, without any effort or design on her part, she was thrown more than ever into the society of the man with whom Anstruther would least have cared to see her.

He need not have troubled himself about the

matter, however. Cecil, though enjoying their society, was quite as far as ever from liking Villars in any way that could militate against the one love of her young life; and the gay subaltern himself had seen by this time so clearly the utter hopelessness of all his day-dreams that his passionate boy's love began to subside into a very strong and faithful friendship.

Carry Villars, his sister, a gay pretty blonde, had developed a sudden and, as such things go, a very real liking for her brother's young Queen, and was constantly carrying her off to ride or drive with her, taking her to croquet-parties and fêtes, introducing her everywhere, till in a week's time Cecil found herself drawn into the regular vortex of London life, whilst waiting for the arrival of the *Crocodile*. She created quite a sensation in the Row, her riding being very far superior to the generality of the horsemanship exhibited there. Indeed Leveston, one day lounging idly amongst the pedestrians as she was passing, overheard one swell of the Dundreary type ask, with a shade of animation

in his manner, "who was that awfully pretty girl on the liver-coloured chestnut."

"By Jove! she knows how to sit," he added, as the chestnut executed a sufficiently energetic buck jump, without apparently inconveniencing her rider in any way.

"The one on the chestnut," answered his companion, a slightly more supercilious-looking individual than the first speaker, and who evidently thought his friend had derogated in condescending to admire an unknown beauty; "I don't know her—she can't be anyone."

"I think you're mistaken there," replied the other; "I saw her at the drawing-room yesterday. She'd just been presented, and I heard the Duke of Dumbleton say she was the prettiest thing had come out this season."

"Oh! if Dumbleton said that, of course it alters the matter; but it's no criterion seeing a girl at the Palace. The Queen's not in the best set by any means; one meets awful snobs there. Didn't the Duke know who she was?"

"Ya-as, in a kind of a way," drawled the other, yawning. Cecil had passed from sight, and the

subject no longer interested him. "He seemed to say she came from Africa, or Arabia, or some of the black countries. I am sure he must have made a mistake," he went on reflectively, "as I don't think she looks at all like a nigger."

Leveston moved on as the speaker arrived at this interesting conclusion, and it became evident, from the expression of his face, that the subject had severely tasked his brain, and was exhausted for the time being.

He repeated this conversation to Cecil, when she returned from her ride, and she laughed merrily over it.

"I know the Duke of Dumbleton," she added ; "he was introduced to me when I was out to-day, so I may consider myself to be in a better set than at St. James's. And now I must run and see if my dress has come home. To-night we go to the Guards' ball, you know ; and, papa, Villars was telling me to-day that we shall be sent to Dublin as soon as the Regiment arrives. I think I shall like that. He says it is considered a very pleasant quarter, and lots of gaiety. The Guards, to whose ball we go to-night, were

there a short time ago, so I daresay I shall hear something about it. We ought to go over first, papa, and get nice lodgings before the others come. Don't you think so? Colonel Houston will be at the ball to-night; perhaps I may meet him."

Thus she rattled on, taking a cup of tea with her father, preparatory to seeing that her things were right. When she went to look, she found them all correct, and even a beautiful bouquet added, which she at once guessed must have come from Villars.

"How good of him!" she said, smiling; "he never forgets me;" and then she thought of some one else, who certainly was not so good to her, but who was far dearer. "How I wish he were coming to night!—it is so long since I have had a dance with him, and I can't half enjoy myself when he is not there."

Which statement she firmly believed; but yet, when once fairly into a ball-room, it is to be feared thoughts of the absent very little affected her enjoyment.



